

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

VALVE SPECIAL!

# PCZONE

ISSUE 167 MAY 2006



**WORLD  
EXCLUSIVE!**

## HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

The next chapter of the greatest game ever!

● Amazing revelations ● Unmissable interviews ● Must-see screens

**PLUS**

20-PAGE VALVE  
EXPOSÉ INCLUDING...  
**SIN EPISODES**

First verdict on the sci-fi shooter

**DEFINITIVE REVIEWS**

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

D&D ONLINE: STORMREALM

THE BATTLE FOR  
MIDDLE-EARTH

THE GODFATHER

**STEAMPUNK'D!**

**RISE OF NATIONS:  
RISE OF LEGENDS**

Hands-on with the  
bizarre strategy epic



**SKIP TO THE END!**

Comedy hero Simon Pegg  
swaps Spaced for sniping!



**WORLD IN CONFLICT**

The brutal new RTS from the  
makers of Ground Control!

**WIN!**

**TINY COMPO**  
What is the  
name of Ally's  
robotic canine  
companion?



WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

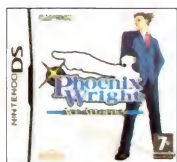
MAY 2006











### PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

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Use the touchscreen to zoom in for a slo-mo roundhouse, fling your enemies to the ground, and take out that Apache helicopter. Movie parodies, kung-fu action and new graphics... Wataaah. Out 10th March.

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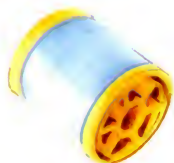




## TRAUMA CENTRE: UNDER THE KNIFE

If you're good with your hands, now's the time to prove it in Trauma Centre: Under The Knife. Use the stylus to play doctor as you learn everything from stitches to open heart surgery. More suction, Nurse! Out 28th April.

**ATLUS**



New ways to operate.



## ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

Use Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection to drop in on your friends around the world. Travel in groups of up to 4, admire what they've done to their town, and enjoy the complete freedom of Animal Crossing: Wild World. See you there. Out 31st March.



New ways to make faraway friends.







New ways to scare, slash, stab, kill and survive.



Nintendo



Use the stylus as a knife and lash out at the undead as they come on smarter and faster than ever. Test your sanity in a fully 3D world of claustrophobia and tension, then drag your friends in with you for a bout of wireless multiplayer horror. Resident Evil Deadly Silence out on 31.03.06

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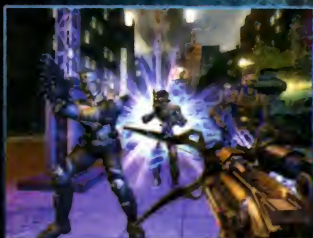


# TIMESHIFT

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PC-DVD MARCH 24TH 2006

[WWW.TIMESHIFTGAME.COM](http://WWW.TIMESHIFTGAME.COM)

[www.uk.atari.com](http://www.uk.atari.com)





COVER STORY

50 HALF-LIFE 2:  
EPISODE ONEThe epic *Half-Life 2* saga continues as the Citadel crumbles and the rebels rise

DOMINIK DIAMOND 146

Holy earwax! Just how bad is this commentary, and how bad is this game?

SIN EPISODES:  
EMERGENCEPREPARE TO ENTER  
A WORLD OF SIN!

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## WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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44 WORLD IN CONFLICT

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 62 words... A doctor tells us why games are stupid. John Woo has a game about jumping about in showers of debris. Simon Pegg talks chlorine. *World In Conflict* attempts to change a genre. Massive Valve feature! *HL2:EP1*! *SIN Episodes*! We review *Oblivion*! The *Godfather* makes us an offer we refuse, then hardware, free stuff and an interview with the SWAT boys. Whew!



## FULL STEAM AHEAD

## HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

exclusive? Check. The first mag in the world to play *SIN Episodes: Emergence*? Double-check. Huge Valve special with every current and future Steam game? Triple-check with a large side order of check. Yes, it's been a particularly exciting month on *PC ZONE* ever since Seattle's most famous videogame developer (after months of incessant stalking) contacted us and asked if we wanted unfettered access to all its upcoming titles. Oh, go on then...

The main event is of course, the next chapter in the *Half-Life* universe, and if you skip immediately to page 50 (via the stunning screenshot on page 14), you'll be able to hungrily digest the latest visuals and info fresh from the decaying remnants of City 17. As for our other major scoop, bear-wrestling behemoth Martin Korda was the chosen one to go and enjoy a hands-on with *SIN Episodes* at Ritual's HQ in Dallas – you can read his playtest (translated directly from his native Slovakian) on page 54.

Elsewhere in our feature, you can discover all the online gaming delights available on Steam, and also what other developers, industry analysts, *PC ZONE* forumites and us have to say about Valve's own love-it-or-hate-it digital distribution service. Personally, I still prefer my PC games carved meticulously out of solid oak and delivered by horse and trap, but it looks like even I'm going to have to get used to this new-fangled modern way of buying new titles. Bah – they'll be telling me I have to upgrade my five-and-a-quarter-inch floppy disc drive next...

Jamie Sefton, editor



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**IN THE ULTIMATE WAR...**

# QUAKE 4

**...THE INVASION HAS BEGUN**



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# CREATIVE

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[idsoftware.com](http://idsoftware.com)



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Strong Language



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It's the greatest RPG experience of our times.  
And we've reviewed it...

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UPFRONT

**Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends**



AMAZING READER OFFER! 110

**FREE!**  
MOBILE PHONE  
GAME  
INSIDE!

**FREEPLAY/FREWARE**

**Freeware**  
Steve Hogarty wants to give you something for nothing

**SEIKLUS**  
Don't try to pronounce it, just play

**I'M OK**  
Honestly, I'm fine

**KLASS OF 99**  
Please Sir, I cannot tell a lie...

**WEDGAME OF THE MONTH**  
David Soften

**FREE GAMES!**

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FREWARE

Be fundamentally offended with *I'm OK*, go adventuring with *Seiklus* and head back in time with *Skool Daze*

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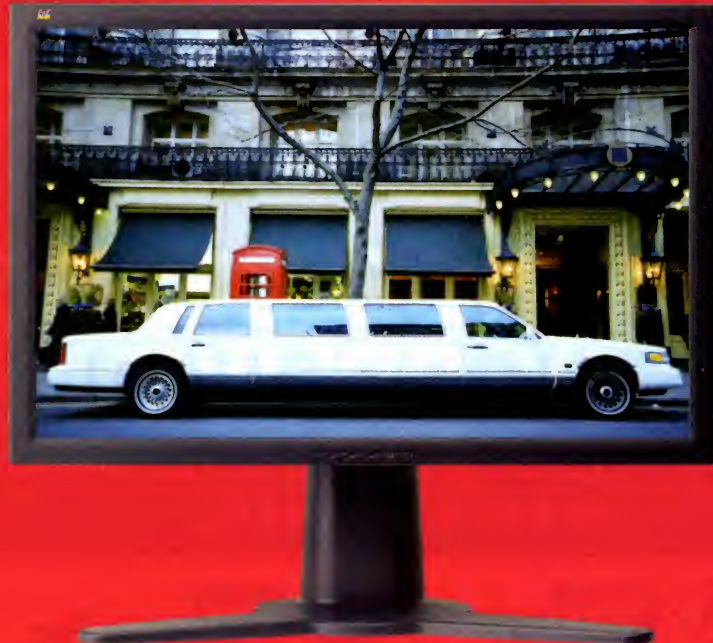
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**PROBLEMS WITH SPACE?**

**GO WIDE WITH VIEWSONIC!**



March 06



**VA1912w (19"):**

Resolution 1440 x 900, contrast ratio 500:1, response time 8ms, brightness 300 cd/m<sup>2</sup>, viewing angles 150°/130° h/v

April 06



**VA2012w (20"):**

1680 x 1050, 600:1, 8ms, 300 cd/m<sup>2</sup>, 140°/125° h/v



**VX2025wm (20"):**

1680 x 1050, 800:1, 8ms (gtg), 300 cd/m<sup>2</sup>, 140°/125° h/v



**VP231wb (23"):**

1920 x 1200, 500:1, 12ms (gtg), 250 cd/m<sup>2</sup>, 176°/176° h/v

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UPFRONT



# MEET THE TEAM

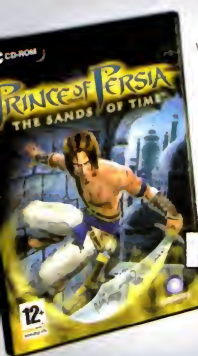
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This is a classic action-adventure game which we described as "a near-seamless gaming experience... Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince".  
**PC ZONE verdict 84%**



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Closing date: April 27, 2006



## JONATHAN 'LOG' BLYTH

**Staff Writer**

**AGE** A neo-natal 32

**LIKES** Vodka, pizza

**DISLIKES** Myrrh, offal

**FANCIES** You, probably

**FAVE GAME** Half-Life 2

**PLAYING?** HL2, Resident Evil 4

Jonathan, or Jon, or Log, has been plucked from a life of office-work, where he was responsible for the misadministration and collapse of women's health screening programs. Before the long-term effects of his ineptitude on the health of Britain's female population becomes clear, he thought it best to move into an area where his terrific shitiness might not prove lethal. His catchphrase is "google my name, buy my book". As it's his first issue, we've asked him to give his initial impressions of the people who will surround him every day until he's sacked.



## DALE PRATLEY

**Art Editor**

Dale is at one with the pixel, and his command of Pantone colours is second only to Ted Pantone himself. Sadly, Dale has a magnetic tongue that occasionally causes monitors to auto-degauss.

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

Photoshop



## STEVE HOGARTY

**Staff Writer**

Steve's innocent face and few years conceal a withered contempt for all life. Seeing a kitten with its tail trapped under a plant pot, Steve licked his dry, flaky lips and rasped: "Bring me the eyes."

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

Psychonauts



## JAMIE SEFTON

**Editor**

When the delightful Sefton belches, it creates a peppermint rainbow under which it's impossible to feel anger. He is single-handedly responsible for the fact that puppies have big paws and go woof.

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

Half-Life 2 Deathmatch



## SUZY WALLACE

**Reviews Editor**

Suzy is gifted with sight beyond sight, so she can see the thing behind what you're looking at. Yesterday, she said: "Look at that." I said: "That red car?" She said: "No, the big truck behind it."

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

Not Far Cry any more



## WILL PORTER

**Deputy Editor**

Will has been variously described as vile, ghastly, awful, nauseating and foul. Other spectators have gone as far as to say that his survival into adulthood is proof that a loving god cannot exist.

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion



## MARTIN KORDA

**Freelancer**

Martin has been off on a jolly adventure to America this month, to clap his eyes on *SiN Episodes: Emergence*. From what I've gathered, Martin gained the ability to clap his eyes in a freak boating accident.

**WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?**

SiN Episodes: Emergence

**STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH...** Wine Gums, Nando's, ginger people and flashy new PCs

**STUFF THAT'S BEEN OF NO HELP WHATSOEVER...** Broken coffee machines, 'compers', crappy old PCs and Clare's mortgage broker

## STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

**THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION** 177 Mins We all agree, it really is quite good

**DO OWLS HAVE ANUSES?** 20 Mins And if they do, why do they bother regurgitating mouse skeletons?

**THAT DEODORANT** 26 Mins Who keeps spraying it near us, and what are they trying to say?

**SIMON PEGG** 55 Mins We're now having entire conversations exclusively using *Spaced* quotes

**NANDO'S CHICKEN** 117 Mins Is 15 times a week too often?

**HYPOTHETICAL ANIMAL FIGHTS** 16 Mins Skinner's Rat vs Schrödinger's Cat, who'd win?

**WILL'S HOLIDAY** 149 Mins He's going to the land of lakes and districts

**STEAM** 10 Mins Is it nice, or will it bring about ecological collapse?

**SUZY'S CAT** 12 Mins Its mysterious past which twisted it into the fickle beast it is today

**OUR FORUM** 2 Mins The delightful and less delightful forunites of [pczone.co.uk](http://pczone.co.uk) - we love them all

### WIN!

Tiny Compo. Give us the correct answer to the mini-question on the cover and you might win some fabbo prizes. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (167), PC ZONE, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. The first correct entry plucked from the magic competition box wins. Closing date: April 26, 2006. The winner of Issue 165's Tiny Compo was Oliver Strong from Portsmouth, who knew that the first *Total War* game was *Shogun*. You are truly a very clever man. Shame about your football team.

**GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS:** 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!



# LETTERS

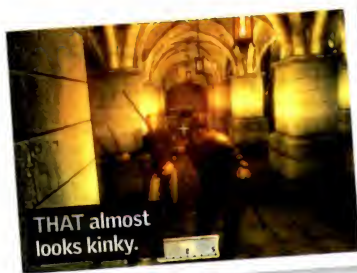
The bit where you write in and *Jamie Sefton* replies...



## BLURRED VISION

What is it with bloom, motion blur, HDR and other supposedly realistic post-processing effects in modern games? Apparently simulating reality, the only effect they have on me is to fool my brain into thinking my eyes aren't focused properly, consequently causing them to water and giving me a blinding headache. If I wanted to play games like this I would poke myself in the eyes and look at the screen through a mist of my own tears. I thank god these effects can (at the moment at least) be disabled. Colin Wilson

I'm actually a bit of a sucker for these graphics gimmicks - I'll never



forget the thrill of first gawping in wonder at the sun glare in *Turok* on the N64 ten years ago. Unfortunately for you Colin, more PC games are set to feature these eye-watering effects - *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (see review page 68) takes them to a whole new level.

## HOORAY FOR SEX!

I just wanted to say something in defence of us gamers and girls. Not only have I myself managed to get myself a very sexy girlfriend (no, you can't have a picture), but my best friend who I may say is an even bigger 'gaming addict' also has a girlfriend. So well done to him, me and any other people who read this and have a girlfriend/boyfriend. Congratulations! Will

Some of us have partners, some of us don't. It doesn't matter to *ZONE* - for us, it's all about the games. Man.

## BETTER RED...

I was appalled at the Letter of the Month asking about which games you can play as a Nazi. What kind of idea is that? When you play a good game, you sympathise with the character and feel hatred for the enemy, and you fight for a cause. *Sniper Elite* was bad enough, crawling

around as a Nazi sharpshooter. I became interested in Soviet history after playing *Call Of Duty*, and from there became a Communist - so don't think games don't change how people think! Will Steele

I'm pretty sure that US developer Infinity Ward didn't make *Call Of Duty* with the implicit intention of influencing gamers to become card-carrying Communists! I'd like to think readers of *PC ZONE* are intelligent enough to distinguish between fiction and reality - I watched the movie *Downfall* on TV the other night and thought it was brilliant, but that doesn't mean I'm suddenly a Hitler fanboy...

## MR PORTER?

I was on holiday in Slovenia recently and happened to pick up a copy of one of their games mags called *Game Zone*. Imagine my surprise when I saw that they were using some of *PC ZONE*'s content - even to the extent of taking a recent 'The Professionals' article from issue 164 and passing off Will Porter's dad Charlie as a man called Joze Kmetec! Is nothing sacred? Andrew Ramsay

Will's anger at discovering his dad's identity has been mercilessly robbed, changed and used in a foreign country without his permission was soon tempered when he learned that our publishers were paid no less than 20p in licensing fees for the privilege.

## Letter of the Month

### GORE OVERLOAD

Your exclusive first look at the amazing *Crysis* in issue 165 got me thinking about gaming realism, and specifically, violence. Limbs torn asunder, heads exploding in vibrant fogs of gore, entrails littering office buildings... All this adds up to a hugely entertaining and possibly traumatic gaming experience.

I like to think I could cope with such scenes of ultra-violence, but not all could though. I know games usually have parental controls on them when they involve killing, but what if a responsible adult like me finds, while sitting at work, they cannot block the images they witnessed the previous night? Stuart Dalgleish

As games get more realistic, developers have to walk the line between being responsible and delivering an exciting, visceral experience. On *PC ZONE* we love the cartoon violence in games such as *GTA: San Andreas* and *Stubbs The Zombie*, but I doubt that a truly photo-realistic depiction of someone being attacked would make those kinds of titles more enjoyable. Why not try out my theory with this new graphics card?

# WIN!



# ONE OF THESE!

You need a good graphics card. We need letters. (Good ones, mind, not rubbish ones like 'PC ZONE rulez, can I have a graphics card please?')

Well, serendipity now! The two needs have collided, right here, right now. Write us a letter today. If it wins Letter of the Month, we'll send you a superb Connect3D X1600 Pro 512MB!

HE'S pigeon-proof.







## I became interested in Soviet history after playing *Call Of Duty*, and from there became a Communist

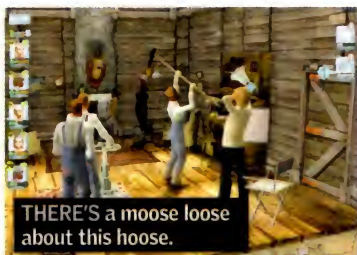
Will Steele, perhaps the most politicised gamer in the free market economy

### HOLLYWOOD R.I.P.

Firstly, thanks for the amazing mag – certainly the most original gaming magazine in the whole ruddy country. Anyway, I was just thinking about this new craze of machinima. Do you think it'd ever be possible for game machinima to break into the mainstream film awards, like the Oscars or the BAFTAs? Most of the work done with games is easily better than the rubbish Hollywood spouts out every month. Recently there's been *BF2's APC Song* – a spoof on Nizlopi's *JCB Song* – and the *Red Vs Blue* series using the *Halo* engine. These are just two good examples of how machinima in games is advancing beyond mainstream Hollywood films in terms of originality.

JavaJawa

**It's already happening. We reported last month that the prestigious Sundance Film Festival in the USA recently judged machinima efforts made using Lionhead's *The Movies*. While I doubt that you'll be able to see a film made using a game engine at your local multiplex any time soon, the technology is already producing results that**



are as entertaining as any movie featuring Martin Lawrence.

### GEOGRAPHY LESSON

I love reading *PC ZONE* every month, especially the excellent Special Report bog-reads. It is however, about one such report in Issue 165 called 'A Degree Of Respect' that I feel inclined to write to you. Now before I start,... I don't claim to be a brainbox or smarty pants, but a bit of geographical investigation on your part may have thrown up the fact that Lincoln University happens to be located just south of Scarborough – at least, according to your map, it does. The last time I looked, the fair city of Lincoln was in Lincolnshire, hence the name. Just thought I would mention it...

Andy Sumner

As editor, I should take the blame for such a heinous factual error and apologise to everyone in the beautiful cathedral city of Lincoln. But I won't. Instead I'll say it's Pavel Barter's fault.

### NO TO RETRO

Let's not live in the past, eh? Week after week I'm confronted by retro gaming saps and I tell them, "The past isn't cool, it's just the past." Don't get me wrong, I loved *Head Over Heels*, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* et al as much as the next gamer – but there's a time and a place for playing such follies and 2006 isn't it. But try telling them that. "Ooh, look at this emulator! I can play *Sonic*!" they cry. I can play *Sonic* too – I have a Sega Master System in my cupboard. The fact that I choose not to isn't an indictment of the quality of the games back then – just a reflection that times have moved on, technology has got better and I no longer need to play games that bloop and bleep at me more than an episode of *Holby City*. Thanks Mr Past and goodbye!

Craig Laycock

It's always fun reminiscing about games in the pub, and the heritage of classics such as *Doom* should never be

I know it must be an old subject here, but *The Movies* is new to me. I looked forward to playing it, but when I did I discovered that easy on-rails business sim + machinima utility = brimming mug of poo.

Petepointon

I like to think I made a few decent movies with some interesting stories, but when no-one watches them you just start to think... What's the point? Still think it's the best Lionhead game to date though.

Liquid\_metal

It does seem to be less 'hardcore' in its approach from what I can tell, but saying that, this just means you can get to the fun stuff quicker.

Degen\_D\_Terrible

Talking about *The Movies*, I could have sworn the first time I planted a Cactus on my lot, one of my staff jumped on it and started humping it... Is it just me or has anyone else seen this?

-Doomus

Join in the forum fun at [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk)

## MY IRON JUNG

For three years *ZONE* staff members have worked to craft renowned creator of analytical psychology, Dr Carl Jung (1875-1961), out of metal. A fount of knowledge, fed with gaming data from past and present, he exists for your enlightenment...



Send your gaming questions and queries to [drjung@pczone.co.uk](mailto:drjung@pczone.co.uk)

### DEAR DR JUNG,

**Q** What's the latest news on *Evil Genius 2*? Haven't heard anything for a year or so. Is the game still going to be made?

Ilovecheese

**A** The future looked bad for *Evil Genius* when the axe fell upon poor Elixir Studios in 2005. The company was the victim of publishers who steadfastly refused to show interest in an intriguing project, only ever seen in these hallowed pages – *Blue Vault* – a game that had been in the works for the best part of two years. *Evil Genius 2* then would seem unlikely, although my weighty fingertips have felt vibrations that would suggest that an offshoot of the fallen company may well be keeping the evil dream alive. Time will tell.

### DEAR DR JUNG,

**Q** Aren't we due another BioWare game by now? *Neverwinter Nights 2* is being done by Obsidian, so that doesn't count.

Stu Stapleton

**A** Yes, things seem quiet on the PC front with BioWare – but it would be wiser to see this vacuum as a transparent smoke-screen than a snub. We know that *Mass Effect* is in production, a remarkable Xbox 360 title that pits you as a soldier in the year 2204, which one would expect to receive a PC port a year or so after its release. *Dragon Age* meanwhile, once seen at an E3 two years past, will be a PC release that will cover familiar fantasy territory with a magnificent new engine and *Neverwinter*-style toolset. I should expect to see more come May.



# LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

forgotten – as we celebrated in our *Games That Changed The World* book, free with Issue 163. However, as to whether I play them much anymore – not really, not when I've got games such as *Half-Life 2: Episode One* just around the corner. Write and tell us what you think.

## TEENAGE KICKS

As a 13-year-old girl, I'm finding it increasingly hard to convince my parents that it's a good idea to spend 35 quid on *Call Of Duty 2*. Even when it's my money! I managed to buy a copy of *The Movies*, which is the best game I've played in ages, but I need MORE. Sometimes, I just want to kill some Nazis while some guy with the world's weirdest English accent yells, "That's one less Jerry to worry about!" Any chance of you lovely people sending me a copy of *Call Of Duty*, now that you have the sequel? Please? I would buy



it myself but I can't find it anywhere. And I mean ANYWHERE. I even looked in the local tiny games shop which is run by a little old man that smells of wee.  
Lorna Dibble

Sorry Lorna, *Call Of Duty* has a BBFC 15 rating, so we can't send it to you. Never mind, we do have a copy of the lovely *Pippa Funnell: The Stud Farm Inheritance* here though – it's all about ponies and stuff, so you'll love it!

## I LIKE. IS NICE

I'm sending you greetings from Maidstone, but my real home is a small

**PC ZONE Around the World**

PC ZONE in front of an innocent rock outcrop.

PC ZONE TRAVEL  
Let's Where? Koh Samui, Thailand  
Class: Holidaymaker

We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

village in the east part of Czech Republic (so, please, excuse potential grammar mistakes). At the first, I wanna to tell you, that you are really great PC games mag – maybe better than Czech mags (*Level*, *Score*, etc). You have all that a good mag should have – letters from readers, lots of fun, competitions and more, more and more. I'm really grateful for everything. But I still have some reservations – sometimes, the pages are little bit chaotic, and the DVD is usually disappointment. But not everything have to be excellent in my life and the USB lamp as the free gift was a really wonderful idea. Thank you, thank you!  
\*Thumbs up\*  
Petr 'Drizzt' Kohoutek

Thanks Petr, that's great. Have you ever considered a career in games journalism?

## GET MOVING, FATSO

Am I the only one who feels like a festering fatty when my various PC game avatars are doing all the running

for me? As a ZX Spectrum-generation late thirty-something, I still enjoy playing games, but I can't help but think that if I was running around in *Battlefield 2* for real I'd be so much slimmer and healthier (except for the getting shot bit). So I recently started scouting around for fitness devices that link to PCs, but most tend to be either quite expensive, bulky or just not that well suited to gaming, being mainly converted exercise cycles. Why doesn't someone came out with a quiet sub-£100 mini-exercise bike or stepper that fits under a desk and lets you move forward and backward at different speeds within first-person shooters?

Ian D

Combining PC gaming with exercise machinery is never going to work because the control systems are always crap. However, you might want to try getting a fat-burning PC game like the dance mat-compatible *Dance Dance Dance* for example, or the virtual sports title *GameTrak Golf*. Failing that, just continue to play the games you love for days on end without eating anything. Hey presto – instant thin!

## IDIOT'S CORNER

Real calls from real idiots...

PCZONE

Hello, PC ZONE?

IDIOT

(Pause, static.)

PCZONE

Hello, PC ZONE?

IDIOT

Yes, hello. I'd like to tell you about a unique business opportunity...

PCZONE

(Sigh.) Please go away. We're a PC games magazine.

IDIOT

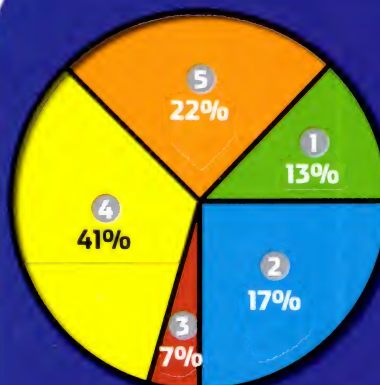
Yes, but Mrs Harrison you're missing out on a chance to...

PCZONE

(We hang up.)

## The Big Question

What are the alternative *Broken Sword 4* titles?



- 1 The Point Of Click: 13%
- 2 Pass The Superglue: 17%
- 3 Stobbart Sings! 7%
- 4 Those Wacky Templars: 41%
- 5 The Crate Pushers Of Allak'mannan: 22%





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unadulterated fear,  
Condemned is practically  
beyond reproach."

Official Xbox 360



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The background of the cover is a screenshot from the game Half-Life 2: Episode One. It shows two G-Man figures in a dimly lit, industrial environment. The figures are dark, with glowing yellow lights at their chest levels. They are standing on a platform, and a bright light source from the right creates a strong lens flare and illuminates the scene. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, orange-brown tones.

**COVER STORY** HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

**COVER STORY**

# HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

The next entry in the greatest series of PC games ever made  
comes blinking out of the shadows...





**I**t's coming. Charging down into your Steam account like an enraged headcrab with zombification on its mind – *Half-Life 2: Episode One* is on its way. This month, we've teamed up with Valve to bring you as much on the future of *Half-Life* as its creators are willing to let through their iron gates. To complement all this we've whipped up a huge Steam sandwich; going hands-on with *SiN: Episodes*, looking deeply into other 'Steam-ed' games that are yet to come and so much more, it's just too daunting to even begin to explain it all. You go on – we'll stay here and catch our breath...

PAGE

48





DEPUTY EDITOR Will Porter

## TRUST NO-ONE

**W**HILE ON MY daily commute this morning, sitting next to businessmen braying into their mobiles and snooty women bewildered by a grown man playing a Nintendo DS, I picked up a copy of the free *Metro* paper. Within said tome I discovered a headline that read 'New M25 game could spark copycat rallies' – and my jaw was summarily dropped. Codemasters you see, the wicked lot, is recreating the illegal M25 races of the 1970s in *TOCA Race Driver 3*. That's really dangerous! It's the sort of thing that could get someone killed!

The prize numpety 'journalist' who had uncovered such dangerous filth clearly didn't want to wave the Games = Evil banner on his own though, and enlisted RAC road safety consultant Robin Cummins to help him. Robin, who's presumably a nice (if slightly confused) man, claimed that such a game could have an effect on young drivers who "may find it difficult to differentiate between reality and fiction". You really couldn't make it up, could you?

Problem is, the one person in this situation who can't differentiate between reality and fiction was the *Metro* journalist himself – who had a story published about a feature in a game that doesn't even exist. With only a mocked-up photo of the M25 featuring some blurry and clearly Photoshopped *TOCA* cars for proof, the fact all this got published is so tragic you can only laugh. Which is presumably exactly what some wag at Codemasters (with Photoshop, a fake press release and free advertising on his mind) was doing. Laughing all the way to the bank.

PCZONE

# UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

## STUNT DOUBLE

Stop press! Molyneux rolls out red carpet for *B&W2* and *The Movies* expansions!

Publisher: EA/Activision | Developer: Lionhead | [www.bwgame.com](http://www.bwgame.com) [www.themoviesgame.com](http://www.themoviesgame.com)

**CONQUERED ALL OF** Eden with your giant monkey? Used every prop and every directorial part of your brain in concocting a cinematic epic about a mime artist who screams swear words until a gorilla does a trump and knocks him over? Then step forward *Black & White 2: Battle Of The Gods* and the slightly less momentously titled, *The Movies: Stunts & Effects Expansion Pack*.

*Battle Of The Gods* is a slightly dark departure for Molyneux's tale of evil cows and skipping tigers. Essentially, the defeated Aztecs were quite upset at having all their menfolk slaughtered in the original game, and have gone and built up a bit of a

cult about it – sacrificing dead bodies on totem poles and such nonsense. And wouldn't you know it – they've only gone and awakened an evil God of the Undead with an army of skeletons, wraith warriors and a giant scabby monkey. Aztecs, eh? Essentially this means: a new kindly turtle creature, two moody new lands, four new miracles and even more of a charming Harryhausen feel to proceedings.

Even more exciting, and thoroughly pre-empted by our good selves in our review by the way, is the *Stunts & Effects Expansion Pack* – making the endless possibilities of *The Movies* even endlesser. You can now script the kind of dumb explosions and

crippling stunts that make the real movies worth watching, and win awards and shatter your stuntmen's femurs in the process.

There's new sets, backdrops and costumes, and new graphical effects (smoke, steam, and of course, fireballs) to make your creations seem less 'meh' and more 'woo'. Rope in an upgraded video editor, a natty green screen set that'll let you place your virtual actors in strange virtual-virtual locations and miniature sets for dramatic sweeps through canyons and skyscrapers. Finally, you can reproduce *Gandhi* with an all-cowboy cast falling into a volcano before exploding. Hooray for Hollywood. And Guildford.



THE Movies: now 18-rated.



"LEAVE it, Tony! He's not worth it!"

## STOP PRESS!

### Battlefield: Future?

Odd forum posts by *Battlefield* developers have left the community pondering the relevance of the number 2142. *BF2142*, anyone? And will it have jetpacks?

### Another Duty Call

A modern-day *COD* and another that remains in the greeny-brown confines of the 1940s are apparently on the cards – if Net speculation is anything to go by.

### Wonderful Toys

*Micro Machines*, the '90s game that first brought the toilet seat into racing track design is making a comeback. Those little cars with the big hearts are on their way!



## 22 Rise Of Legends

Real-Time Strategy? Or Really Terrifyingly Strange? Probably the first one actually, but *ROL*'s still quite weird in a nice way.



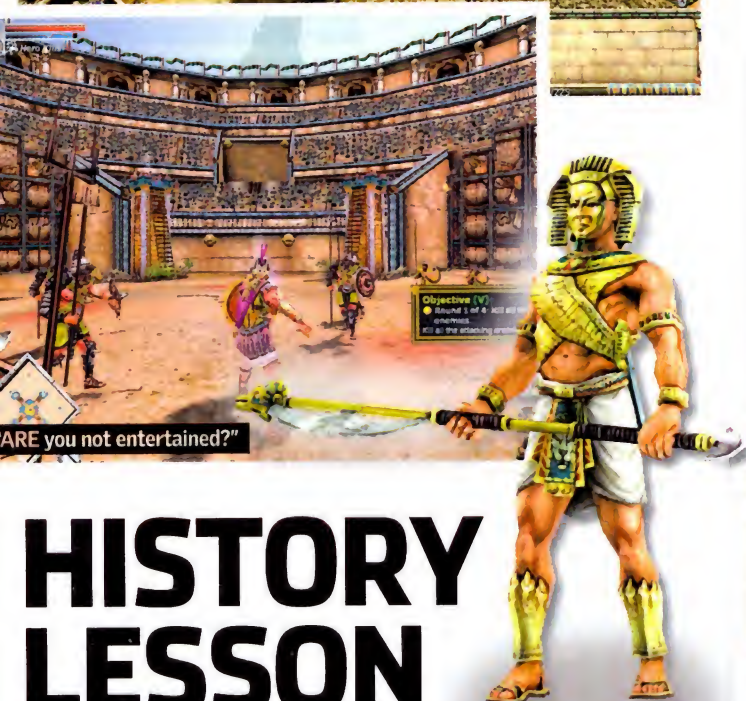
## 50 HL2: Episode One

Discover Gordon's youth as he takes part in some pod-racing and discovers his affinity for the Force. Maybe.



## 54 SiN Episodes: Emergence

Big guns, big muscles, big, er... How shall we put it... Surgically-enhanced features on the lady characters: welcome to the world of John Blade.



# HISTORY LESSON

## The fall and rise of *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War*

Out: June 16 | [www.riseandfallgame.com](http://www.riseandfallgame.com)

A RECENT LOOK at Midway's *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War* allayed some of our fears about the company's decision to remove developer Stainless Steel from the project and take it in-house. *R&F* appears to be progressing solidly, combining in-depth, real-time strategy with third-person, bloody hack 'n' slash – using eight heroes (such as Cleopatra) from the Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Persian empires.

As well as this unique selling point, *R&F* also features dramatic naval battles that allow you to board and capture enemy vessels, ram other ships and mount surprise attacks on land in both historical and made-up conflicts. While we're yet to be fully convinced that the mix of RTS and third-person fighting can be integrated successfully, *Rise & Fall* is definitely one to watch on its release in June.

# Free Money!

Grab a fiver in betting money courtesy of Prize Fight games site

[www.prizefight.co.uk](http://www.prizefight.co.uk)

A NEW WEBSITE, Prize Fight, has arrived, that allows anyone 18 years or older to play online games such as *Counter-Strike: Source* and *Battlefield 2* for cash prizes.

The idea's simple. You pay an entrance fee to participate in an event, such as a timed *Battlefield 2* deathmatch, and the combined fees of all the gamers go into a prize pot (minus a small percentage for the Prize Fight people) that's shared among the winners. There's always a full programme of events between 4pm and midnight, with other genres of games, such as racing, considered for future competitions.

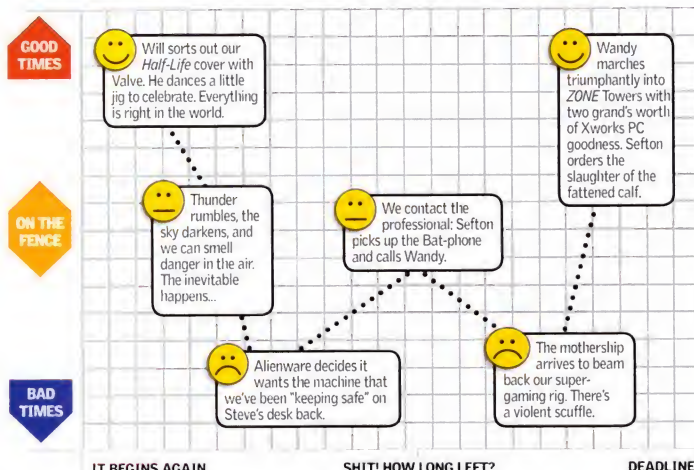
To get you started, Prize Fight has given you a free £5 in betting money – sign up on the site and use the following promotional code: FTPECZ-PROMO-LUAPA-ZZERP. Remember folks, you can lose as well as win – as our cack-handed editor discovered...



## STUFF

Fans of tanks and moving at speed towards large German conurbations will be delighted to learn of *Rush For Berlin*. It doesn't just reiterate the WWII story in the RTS style though, but pits you against an alternate timeline. Each mission takes a number of days; take too long and the Nazis have time to invent the stuff they never managed to get into the war. So get a move on, before Goering invents the nuclear horse.

## LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER







Dear Steve,  
*Doom 3* gets a kicking whenever it's mentioned these days. But I liked it, and continue to like it. I've just completed *Resurrection Of Evil* and, crap ending aside, I really enjoyed it. So there you go: crucify away. I don't care. Treat me rough.  
 Will Porter

Dear Will,  
 I haven't known you that long, but I always thought you came across as a smart bloke. Then I hear you spouting this nonsense about a game with gameplay so archaic, so dull, so bloody boring, scripted and on-rails that it actually makes me realise you're not smart at all. You're really quite simple.  
 Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve  
 I find it fun, I like the monsters, I like the setting – am I so wrong? Yes, in large doses it can get a bit plodding – but in terms of fancying a bit of a mindless monster blasting then I honestly don't really see its crime.  
 WP

Dear Will,  
 You would find *Doom 3* fun – I could give you a bag of 10p coins and you'd sit on the mechanical horse outside Tesco all day. It's pointless. How many times can an imp materialise behind you before it's just not frightening anymore?  
 SH

Dear Steve,  
 I like the visuals, I love the sounds, I think that its menagerie of beasts are the best designed of recent years. You're not going to get me off this mechanical horse Hogarty – and if you do I'll throw a tantrum in the freezer aisle.  
 WP

Dear Will,  
 You love the visuals and the sounds? You've said the same about your *Open & Listen: Farm Animals* book with the pop-up cows, and that's not winning any Booker Prizes.  
 SH

Dear Steve,  
 As I said, sometimes you don't want to play particularly weighty games. You just want to shoot stuff. In the same way that I sometimes read trash thrillers and not Booker Prize-winning novels, sometimes I play *Doom 3* instead of *Civ IV*. Is this too way-out a concept for you to handle?  
 WP

Dear Will,  
 Yes. I refuse to accept that anybody could like a game which I dislike and I project these feelings aggressively. I'm sorry.  
 SH

## GIVING THE MMO A LIFT

**Tired of mean-spirited goblins and waving swords? Try *Auto Assault***

**FAST FORWARD** A couple of hundred years and we'll all be grumpy humans, spiritual mutants and iron-legged biomeks. Plus, we'll all hate each other so much that we'll never get out of our cars, not even to say hello. In fact, we'll spend a lot of time killing each other, and that's virtually the opposite of saying hello. This is *Auto Assault*, the MMO from NCsoft that's been resting its balls on the hype-award tables at recent E3s.

This is about the action, says NCsoft, so get in there and fight. To this end, there are no penalties for dying. If you get blown up, or drive into a lake of green blood in a misguided search for sunken treasure, then you're picked up by a salvage craft and dropped at the last repair outpost you visited. No currency spent, no experience lost – in fact, the times we managed to drown ourselves in the beta, we actually gained 25XP for the kill. Suicide can level you up.

At first, it does seem slightly jarring, having the combat system of an RPG applied to something that feels so instinctively like an action game. The speed, see, she makes the men crazy. And the crazy men, they want the blood. This certainly isn't the *Carmageddon* arcade action you might be looking for, but it is a nippy MMO that's



instantly engaging to play, even if its combat still feels ruled by the dice.

Still, at least you're not just standing there swinging a sword around like a big fart. You're driving around in a brum-brum, driving into things and shooting stuff with a gun turret. *Auto Assault* could just bring the MMO out of its armoured shell.





# JUST KEEP TELLING YOURSELF "IT'S ONLY A GAME"

SPUN OFF ON A TIGHT  
LEFT HANDER THROUGH  
THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

OVERTOOK ALFA ROMEO GT  
TO TAKE FIRST PLACE

NOT SIDESWIPE BY THE  
MERCEDES IN EUROPE

OIL LEAKING FROM BOTTOMING  
OUT OVER THE CORKSCREW

SWAPPED PAINT IN BARCELONA  
WITH THE ZONDA AROUND  
THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE

HIT RAILINGS ALONG RAINY CURVE

OUTBROKE THE  
CORVETTE INTO  
ANDRETTI HAIRPIN

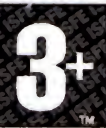
REAR ENDED TUSCAN WHILST  
ADMIRING THE LONDON EYE

## Evolution **GT**

THIS IS NO SIMULATION



Mercedes-Benz AMG



RenderWare



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# HOT PROPERTY

A licence to print money, or a permit to kill gaming stone dead? Just how clever is intellectual property, asks *Pavel Barter*

TOCA: licences every way you look...



AGE Of Conan: licensed gaming done well?



**Reporter**  
Pavel Barter

**K**IDS WILL DO anything for Dairylea and game publishers will do anything for a licence – two compulsions that from an outside standpoint could sometimes be seen as fairly misguided, but two compulsions that create huge piles of cash nevertheless. With licensing price tags rising to one million dollars, and with the popularity of licensed games leading to millions more, it's hardly surprising that some publishers are willing to sell their mothers for the sake of some hot IP.

"One games company approached us and said, 'if you give us the licence, we'll give you a nice big fat cheque so you can go off and play golf in the Caribbean,'" recalls Raymond Goldsmith of International Sports Multimedia (ISM), the exclusive licensee for the Olympic Games. (He went on to turn down the offer because he doesn't like golf and was already going to the Caribbean.)

ISM rents out the Olympic ring logo to developers, as well as "all the content

within individual events and stadiums," Goldsmith goes on to explain. "We have plans detailing where the television cameras are positioned around the swimming pool. We know the precise positions of each sun umbrella, table and chair. We even know what the judges and assistants are wearing. It's as credible as watching the Olympics on TV." Now as it turns out, *Torino 2006* (the game) was more than a little bit shit – but the value of knowing that when your skier prepares for the downhill event, every tree, building and flag is as it is in real life and on telly is vital. The logo funnels a message direct to the shopper in Woolworths that 'this game is from the Olympics and certainly not from a dry-ski slope in Chatham'. Success can then be assured.

## KIDDIE FARE

Fact: licensed property sells. Take a glance at the Top 10, stocked with such hippo poo as *Harry Potter* and *Narnia*, while works of genius like *Beyond Good & Evil* are left convulsing in the gutter. It's not difficult to see where publishers' preferences lie. Ubisoft, chuffed by the success of ape simulator *King Kong*, has announced that 25 per cent of its turnover will

soon come from movie licences: great if there are more giant monkeys, not so great if we're faced with *Bridget Jones: The Game*. Meanwhile, EA and Activision are stockpiling their dungeons with enough exclusive property rights to withstand a nuclear attack – *Shrek Superslam Wrestling* anyone?

But all is not lost. If a licence is in the right hands, then we're treated to a far more authentic experience. For example, Funcom is currently adding the finishing touches to *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures*, a MMOG based on the famous loin-clothed barbarian (now Governor of California).

"We have access to all content related to the Conan universe," raves Funcom's product director, Jørgen Tharaldsen. "We're supported by the immensity of a 70-year legacy, including comics, novels and movies, and we're trying to be as true as possible to the original works of author Robert E Howard."

## RETRO CRAP

Back in gaming's wonder years, no-one gave a rat's arse about licensing. Developers used the names of real-life sport stars without asking permission, and racing games included posh motors without paying a penny. "It was wonderful," grins Toby Heap, licensing

WHEN they say Torino they actually mean Turin. Silly foreigners.



BFMEII: book rights to film rights with mixed results.



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk  
✉ pavel barter, pc zone,  
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw





director for Codemasters. "You'd put anything you wanted into a game and you didn't have to worry." These days, render David Beckham's head without paying him zillions, or create a Batman game without signing a deal with the caped crusader's landlord, and you're likely to feel the strong arm of the law.

How do publishers get their hands on a licence? According to Toby Heap, licensing director for Codemasters, it sometimes "happens by luck at a trade fair or licensing seminar, but the normal route is that a developer or publisher will hunt down a property it's interested in."

In a *Sleepless In Seattle*-esque twist, Funcom was planning an online fantasy RPG when it discovered that Conan Inc was looking for someone to create one. Fredrik Malmberg, *Conan*'s licensing manager, says that such coincidence is common: "We get a lot of requests because *Conan* is so well known and we usually have an idea where we want to take the brand next."

Financially, licensing deals vary. Some licensees commission a publisher, others take royalties from sales, but most demand a shit-load of dough before a game developer even sniffs its IP. Racing

games can pay up to \$1,000,000 for vehicle render rights, and a luxury brand like Ferrari or Aston Martin will cost more than your average jalopy.

"Major car companies often only license for one game in a franchise at a time," says Heap. "This enables them to renegotiate every year, increase the fees, and give them some control over the products they appear in. A car manufacturer wouldn't want to be involved if we introduced cop-shooting in *Colin McRae* a few years down the line."

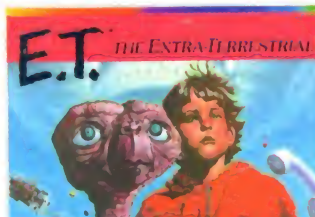
## DOWN THE PAN

Some licensees can be precious about their property, breathing down the developer's neck to make sure there's nothing dodgy going on (a brand like *Harry Potter* would be somewhat bugged if it turned into an 18+ FPS), while a few movie licenses are poisoned chalicees, especially if the sequels are rubbish. "Look at *Robocop* or



## Sin City

Some licences stink like a skunk's carcass



### ET: The Extra Terrestrial (1982)

Looking like a space turtle's penis, *ET* was so appalling that nearly all five million copies were left rotting in an Atari warehouse – then promptly buried in a New Mexico landfill.



### Back To The Future Part II (1990)

Marty McFly is more unresponsive than a stroke victim and his hover-board is a balsa wood atrocity. Shattering our dreams of the future, it was a simple case of Back to the Bargain bin.



### Bible Adventures (1994)

Kick Goliath's ass with a kung fu David, then prepare for the bolt of lightning when you drop baby Moses. The Good Book doth not maketh a good game. Probably quite a cheap licence to pick up, though.



### Robocop (2003)

A game so bad, so truly bad, that Titus Interactive is awaiting trial for war crimes. Take *Robocop*, make everything look boxy, remove any trace of fun, wait for five years – then sell, sell, sell! Doesn't make the punters buy, buy, buy, though.

*Highlander*," says Jason Kingsley of UK developer Rebellion. "The first ones were brilliant but they gradually got worse and worse, and that's got to affect sales of game tie-ins." *The Matrix* too, seemingly the hottest property around after the first movie, garnered so much disdain through its flabby and preposterous sequels that *Path Of Neo* and *The Matrix Online* were without doubt tarnished in punters' eyes.

As Toby Heap speculates: "Hollywood licenses bring other concerns: will the movie flop? Can we get the game out on time and to a reasonable standard of quality? How long will the movie be in public consciousness?" Some tie-ins begin production, such as *Sahara* or *Underworld: Evolution*, but don't even make a release – the latter formerly using a multiplayer mod as a cheaper platform for its game with *Underworld: Bloodlines*. But whether they're releasing *King Kong* or *Aeon Flux*, publishers love to ride the back of Hollywood marketing, associate with

the big stars, and link their game with a massive, often global brand.

The occasional publisher even goes a step further, liking the IP so much that it buys the company. Such was the case when Rebellion snapped up *2000AD*. "We now license the characters to other people," says Jason Kingsley, who is in negotiations with Hollywood studios for a new *Judge Dredd* movie, and is releasing a game based on *2000AD*'s *Rogue Trooper* later this year.

Like Rebellion's *Alien Vs Predator* or LucasArts' *Star Wars: KOTOR*, some of the best licensed games take the bare essentials from the IP to create their own masterpiece. However, we will always be subjected to licensed turkeys – from 1982's *ET* to 2005's *Path Of Neo*. "I hope we can move towards a position where gameplay is the most important factor. A licence should enhance a great game, not take the place of gameplay," concludes Heap. As a wise sage once said, you can call a turd by any other name, but in the end, it's still a turd. **PCZ**





NOT a trace of Tolkien to be found.

THE OTHER DA VINCI CODE...

# RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

Legendary civilisations to command? *Steve Hogarty* rises to the challenge

DEVELOPER Big Huge Games PUBLISHER Microsoft WEBSITE [www.riseoflegends.com](http://www.riseoflegends.com) PREVIOUSLY IN... 166

## THE LOWDOWN

- Sequel to a great RTS ☒
- Amazingly original world ☒
- Not an orc in sight ☒
- Full storyline with three linked campaigns ☒
- Perhaps too wacky? ☐

ETA  
April  
'06

**M**Y FELLOW JOURNALISTS mumbled something about a tuba, but it was clear the decrepit cab driver wanted us to bounce his own question back at him. So we did. "Nah, I don't play any instruments," he wheezed in response, "but I write songs... Ain't none of 'em been published though." Then, upon our request, he started singing a ballad about being horny for George Washington as he veered dangerously about the streets of Baltimore at two in the morning, ignoring red lights and stopping in all the wrong places. We clapped our hands on our knees and sang along once we got the gist of the chorus ("I love you George, I love you, I do" followed by a hiccupping noise), and as we meandered through the peaceful Maryland suburbs I reflected upon how much fun I'd had on my very first press trip abroad. We were all in mortal danger of course, but that's hardly the point.

I hadn't gone all that way for an insane, musical cab driver though. Neither had I gone for a pair of British Airways socks (which I was alarmed to discover, disintegrate after a single wash). I'd been sent to play Big Huge Games' new strategy

game, *Rise Of Legends*. Sound familiar? Well it should, it's the sequel to *Rise Of Nations*, a game *PC ZONE* dubbed "one of the most satisfying and addictive RTS games ever crafted", before giving it a Classic award and running along the platform with tears streaming down our faces, waving handkerchiefs as the game sped off into stardom.

## FLIGHT OF FANTASY

Some of us weren't running along that platform though, and admittedly the game only just snuck a Classic award. Despite its greatness, *Rise Of Nations*' isometric 2D graphics looked a tad dated and dealt with subject matter which strategy fans were all too familiar with. Tim Train, Big Huge Games' vice-president of development and operations explains why *Rise Of Legends* will turn that accusation on its head.

"With *Rise Of Legends*, we wanted to create a world in which as soon as you see it, you're in awe of the way that world works and the way the graphics look. When we started off with that as an idea, we thought, 'alright, we want to do a fantasy game, but everyone who sets out to do a fantasy game starts using Tolkien'. Tolkien's

BET they can't pick up Sky One.







1998



2000

2003



2004

THOSE laser-pointer pens are so annoying.



TAKE that! Silly fragile ecosystem.



## People have been saying they want something different, and this delivers that in the gameplay and setting

Tim Train, VP of development and operations, Big Huge Games



A Cuotl god prepares for war, or perhaps to walk his dogs.



## Dominance Spheres

You've got to dominate to subjugate



THE cracks were beginning to show.

Now instead of pummeling your foes with brute force, you can meet objectives such as having the most wealth, or having the most foot soldiers to achieve Dominance in one of four areas and unlock special abilities. "You're competing for these Dominances in a non-military way," explains Big Huge Games' Tim Train. "It's not just about building up the biggest army and fighting in the centre of a map. Sure, that's a way to win, but another way is by being sneaky and taking Dominances, so that if the enemy comes along with a huge army, you have the power to summon your allies or steal his troops. Dominances allow you to gain an edge, not just because you've built a big army but because you were smarter than the other guy."

float impressively on huge lumps of rock in the desert. The Vinci, on the other hand, are a race of Renaissance-themed steampunk tech-heads, with machines, weapons and vehicles inspired by the sketches of Leonardo Da Vinci. Imagine massive, lumbering clockwork men and bizarrely shaped helicopters and you're on the right track – their buildings are brass and copper behemoths.

The final race, as if it couldn't get any weirder, are the Cuotl, a bunch of bloodthirsty Mesoamerican Aztec types who were enslaved by a group of aliens who crashed on the planet. These aliens set themselves up as the gods of the Cuotl, and as such the race acts as the halfway point between the technical Vinci and the magical Alim, using advanced technology which essentially constitutes magic. Their cities, as you'd expect, look Aztec in design and bizarrely enough, when you build new districts they're constructed somewhat digitally using a big red laser from the sky. Told you this would be weird.

Taking such a dangerous step away from traditional RTS themes was no doubt a brave choice on Big

the inspiration for pretty much every fantasy game out there, you've always got the elves and the dwarves and the orcs – and while those things are certainly fun, we thought it was time for something different to come into the strategy market."

### SPACED RACE

Creating a fantasy universe from scratch is no mean feat, but from what we've seen of *Rise Of Legends* so far, the developer seems to have carved out its own niche in terms of setting and style.

For a start, the game revolves around three new races which I'll list for you now in my own personal order of ascending coolness. The Alim are an Arabian race based in ancient Middle-Eastern mythology and dependent on monsters, genies, spirits and giant scorpion creatures – their cities

"HELLO, fire brigade? Yes, I'll hold."



THE game's most impressive when the Cuotl gods get angry.



CLOCKWORK men: try not to wind them up...



Huge Games' part. Tim Train continues: "The tricky part, and something which we realised once we'd started, is that the reason everybody draws from Tolkien is because people feel like they know that an orc is evil and warlike, and that elves are good and kind and in touch with nature. So the way we approached that problem was by drawing inspiration from our cultures throughout human history. That allows people to feel like they have a connection to those cultures and races. I mean, when you

look at the Vinci race, you understand they're inspired by Da Vinci, you know they're inventors and that they're all about technology. They dominate nature and extract all the resources from it."

Besides the hugely original setting and the fact that the game is now in full 3D (another discarded gripe from *Rise Of Nations*), Big Huge Games has taken steps to add everything it missed out on the first time around. It's also refined the gameplay by removing many of the resources and replacing them with a few basics such as Timonium, an ore that can be mined, and Wealth, which can be gained through trading with caravans. Again, even things like trading are dressed up in *Rise Of Legends'* fantastic new style. The Vinci race transport goods in propeller-driven blimps, while the Alim use scarab beetles to get from one city to the next.

## DISTRICT LAW

The cities, while we're on the subject, have been overhauled too. You now start with a capital city which you can physically expand by building one of three types of districts around it. For each of these

TEMPORAL distortion and localised black holes – our favourite.





of steampunk  
e in heaven.



THE storyline allows for giant  
eagles with laser beams.



districts you build, bonuses are granted in the form of more caravans for increased trading, more available military upgrades and other treats. The much-loved dynamic borders system has been left intact, and each race has been given a whole host of unique spells, technology and units.

## THE SKY AT NIGHT

For example, one of the high-end Vinci technologies is a massive copper telescope which, while looking fantastic, allows you to cast your line of sight across a narrow cone-shaped area of the map in any direction. Couple this with another power, such as an epic spell which shatters an area of ground with nature-killing death machines, and you've got a powerful long-range attack combination.

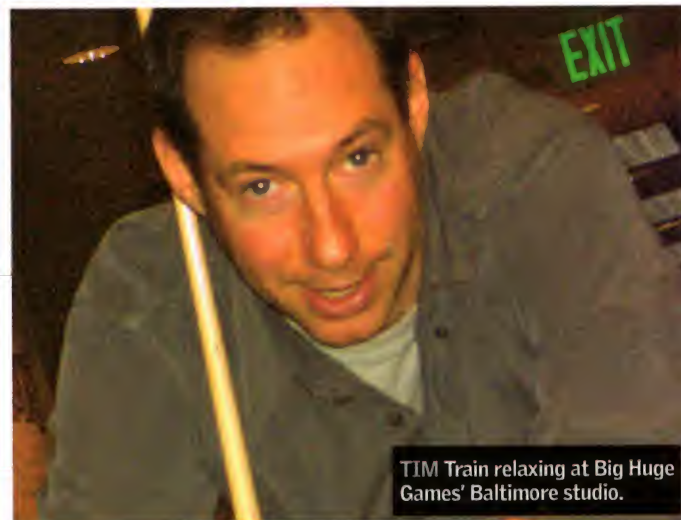
Equally, heroes now take on the form of ancient Aztec gods, massive clockwork

LAVA Men always find it  
hard to make friends.



## Big Huge Studios

Big Huge Games' home  
away from home



TIM Train relaxing at Big Huge Games' Baltimore studio.

Right in the centre of the Timonium business park in Baltimore (yes, Timonium, we spotted it too), sits the massive mirror-glass citadel which houses Big Huge Games. It's an impressive place, with a lounge and bar overlooking a Holiday Inn and a dusty motorway. OK, so the view isn't great, but there is a Big Huge pool table and a Big Huge fridge filled with Coca-Cola – it's almost like being invited into the home of an eccentric half-millionaire. Tim Train reckons that due to the amount of late nights people have to work, the studios should feel as homely as possible. Industrious programmers can even drop their kids off at the Big Huge crèche and keep an eye on them from their desk via a webcam. We're not sure if that's heart-warming or just slightly odd.

beasts and mythological scorpion kings, capable of laying waste to squads of foot soldiers with ease.

## THE HOLY TRINITY

Next on the list of things that weren't in *Rise Of Nations* but probably could've been is *Rise Of Legends'* full campaign and storyline. Three of them in fact, one for each race, which follow the adventures of a young Vinci inventor named Giacomo.

More interesting however, is the redesigned online mode which promises to refine the multiplayer game from the hour-spanning grinds of *RON* to 20-30-minute games. Micro-management has been toned down to negligible levels, while the district building aspects of the single-player game lend themselves to three distinct playing styles online: rush, economy boom or defend. Improvements to the online game also come in the form of custom maps with randomly generated elements such as mountain passes and rivers, and matchmaking algorithms taken from Xbox Live, as well as persistent stats and even a built-in messenger service.

So while Big Huge Games deserves every plaudit for attempting to forge ahead and take the genre to wonderfully

new places in terms of style and art direction, it remains to be seen how well the three radically different races can hang together, and whether the *Rise Of Legends* universe will be even remotely believable. Or perhaps a market drowning in World War II remakes and *Lord Of The Rings* lore may simply soak up such an innovative and dangerously brave idea.

"When you put out a game, you never know how people are going to respond," enthuses Tim Train. "We're putting all our chips on people who are more or less done with the Tolkien stuff. The feedback we've had from the fan community leads us to believe we're on target – people are really responding to the new races. People have been saying for a long time that they want something different, and this game will deliver that, in gameplay and in the entire setting. We're happy with that and think people are going to be really into."

Whether it's in the cackle of a cab driver as he finishes his third performance of the evening, or in the minds of the guys at Big Huge Games, creativity is definitely abundant on the streets of Baltimore. However, we'll have to wait and see if either will be successful. And our money isn't on the George Washington guy. **PCZ**



# THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

**AFTER LAST MONTH'S** horrifying revelation that sewers in games were simply all wrong, we didn't think it could get any worse, but this month we expose the most blindingly incorrect aspect of PC games we've ever had the misfortune to come across – medicine. Ironically, it seems one of

mankind's oldest technologies will never be married to one of mankind's newest, but we didn't realise our most beloved games could be this grossly inaccurate. Turns out they were wrong, an entire industry, *just wrong*. Shocking, we know. Doctor Funnell explains where it all went bad.

**THIS MONTH:  
MEDICINE**

Expert: Dr Funnell Job: General Practitioner  
Company: The NHS  
Specialised Pedantry: Healing methods in PC gaming



## HALF-LIFE 2: MORPHINE

Morphine is a potent painkiller but does cause drowsiness. Although it might lessen Mr Freeman's agony after a fall and fracturing his legs, the best he could

hope for would be to lay there with lessened pain in a drowsy state. You simply cannot stand on broken legs. He would need immediate medical assistance if he were ever to recover the ability to walk, and more importantly, not succumb to his injuries and die. Sadly, not a situation in which he would be able to carry on and save the world."

**PCZONE**



Broken legs just don't work



## CALL OF DUTY 2: WAITING

As with *Half-Life 2*, all gunshot wounds in any part of the body carry the risk of being life-threatening and permanently disabling. You are likely to suffer

massive blood loss and become rapidly unconscious, so simply taking a rest behind a nearby crate would prove fatal in this situation. Also, the bloodshot effect and blurred vision again does not have much bearing on reality. You'd have no vision, no blood pressure, no breathing and a falling pulse, I'm afraid. This is horribly inaccurate and an insult to anybody with even a vague knowledge of medicine."

**PCZONE**



If it worked for Arnie...



## MAX PAYNE: ENTIRE BOTTLES OF PAINKILLERS

"Any medication taken by mouth is likely to take a half to one hour to exert any effect. Taking multiple painkillers after being shot several times would only worsen the effects and make no difference to the final outcome. Max is obviously grief-stricken as he has just lost his wife and child, as such he should seek assistance from his local GP if he wishes to get in contact with a psychiatrist. His loss is clearly not an excuse to go on a killing spree, however."

**PCZONE**



Payne-fully bad



## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ROAST DINNERS

"Everyone likes a roast dinner. However, without a proper diet or regular exercise, frequent consumption of roast dinners will quite simply lead to obesity, which in turn creates a whole host of potential medical problems. What's even more unlikely is the fact that eating roast dinners seems to heal bullet wounds. How this is relevant, I do not know."

**PCZONE**



Not all gravy



## FAR CRY: FIRST AID BOX BANDAGES

"Band aids will not help much with the deep lacerations inflicted by enraged mutants. Jack is likely to suffer dangerous blood loss and require urgent help but sadly, he is on a tropical island and so would probably just lie down quietly under a palm tree and demise. Medically speaking, I'm afraid there's little hint of reality with any of these games as I suspect most people are aware. I would begrudgingly put *Far Cry* first however, as at least Jack Carver has the rather naive idea that applying a few crepe bandages to his multiple deep lacerations might make some small difference to his desperate situation."

**PCZONE**



Best of a bad bunch

## WINNER: Far Cry

*Far Cry* scrapes a victory here by getting the least things wrong, but it's by no means a win to be proud of. Congratulations anyway go to Crytek, for trying a little bit.

## ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

• Spaceships • Barrels • Medieval Weaponry • Crates

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at [TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk](mailto:TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk) and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.





# CULTURE CLASH

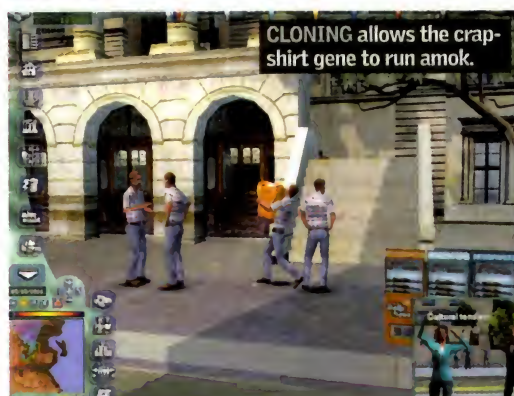
Set fire to the suits in *City Life*

www.citylife-lejeu.com | ETA: April 2006

**LOOK OUTSIDE. EVERYONE'S** walking around, minding their own business. They all hate each other, but thanks to good parenting (and the fear of reprisals) they're not running around kicking each other in the face and nuts. This is peace – humanity in balance. Monte Cristo has brought cultural disharmony to the world of town planning with *City Life* – introducing six distinct cultures for you to deal with, from the Hilton-esque 'elites', scoffing wrens' egg omelettes off ruby platters, to the 'have-nots', who are forced to lick whatever nutrients they can from each other's mucky bodies.

It's your job in *City Life* (on top of the usual sim-planning, schooling and the provision of swimming pooling) to keep these six cultures in check. The blue collar workers don't think much of the artsy fringe types, so you're encouraged not to build mechanics' shops next to mime artist refuges, unless you want your meticulously planned streets running thick with blood and face paint. It's all set in real-time 3D, and as you'd expect, you can descend like a clawless god-eagle to watch your wee folk hugging or arguing to the same sort of extent we've seen recently in competent stuff like *Tycoon City: New York*. It's all pleasantly distracting, although when a game appears in which you can pinch someone's arse in a bus queue and blame it on a bald man, fax us.

It's a brave conker that'll take on the heritage of Maxis' 17-year-old oak tree, but it's also been a good two years since the



*SimCity 4: Rush Hour* expansion gave everyone the chance to flood a hospital. Come April, *City Life* might just slot into the mayor-shaped hole in your heart.



## THE MAN WHO KNOWS



Utah, a place in America previously known only for providing the opening scenes in *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, in which a young Indy gets covered by snakes in a train, has loudly decreed that **violent videogames** should be judged in the same way as the hardest of **hardcore pornography**. A bill has been passed 56-8 in the state's House of Representatives, ensuring that vendors who sell *Grand Theft Auto* to kiddie-winks will be dealt the same severity as one who sells a copy of a DVD that features **copious penetration**. Games set to violate this law and meet censure were said to be those deemed "patently offensive", and lacking in any serious "literary, artistic, political or scientific value for minors". Invented commentators who pointed out that the film *Emmanuelle* was quite arty, political in the way that it dealt with **female wants and needs**, and that it was quite scientific in its study of **people having sex in planes** were roundly rebuffed by **Republican Scott Wyatt** – who has apparently never seen it, and presumably never played a game either.

The state of Utah has also been proved entirely correct in its rabid hatred of the new, by smutty activity in online clever 'em up, *Second Life*. Virtual escorts operating from virtual whorehouses are offering virtual sex for real money – \$3.50 being the going rate for a 30-minute service from one of **hundreds of buxom blondes** that are claimed to have "REAL GIRLS BEHIND EVERY ANIMATION!!!" Virtual den of iniquity **The Barbie Club** claims to be able to save you "thousands of dollars on the real thing" which may, presumably, lessen the risk of venereal disease but still contains no guarantee that an online sexual acquaintance will not be a **gruff, hairy Texan**. With aesthetic online reviews of individual *Second Life* call girls now appearing at <http://sl-escorts.com> (criticising such faux pas as the misspelling of 'suck you' as 'suk u' and such), the Utah gaming bill is widely expected to spread all over the world as soon as possible.

**"Invented commentators who pointed out that *Emmanuelle* was quite arty were rebuffed by Republican Scott Wyatt, who has never seen it, and presumably never played a videogame either"**





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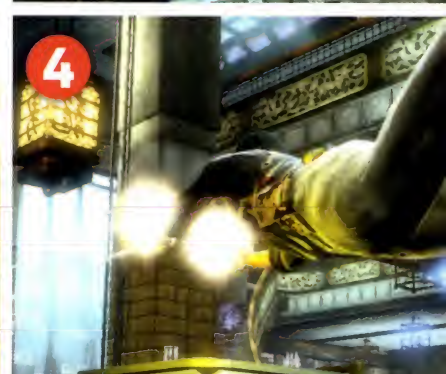
# STRANGLEHOLD

DEVELOPER Midway Studios Chicago PUBLISHER Midway  
WEBSITE [www.midway.com](http://www.midway.com) ETA Winter

**R**EMEMBER HOW MAX Payne's enemies would casually chat about their love for John Woo? Remember how Max once described himself as "making like Chow Yun-Fat"? They were of course referring to the gunplay that Payne so consciously aped – but now, almost five years later, that action has been given its own official license. *Stranglehold* is an official spiritual successor to *Hard Boiled*, John Woo's magnum opus that saw Mr Yun-Fat massacre hundreds upon hundreds of Chinese gangsters in glorious slow-motion. We've been praying for a *Max Payne 3*, but we're thinking that we might have just been presented with something even better. Using Epic's super-spiff Unreal Engine 3 and boasting a cast comprising of the as yet unannounced Hollywood A-list, this is the new great hope for third-person action. Bring on the symbolic white doves...

8





## The Bigger Picture

### 1 THAT LOOKS UNCOMFORTABLE

The opening scenes of *Hard Boiled* took place in a Hong Kong tea shop in which a gun deal went wrong and Tequila took it upon himself to sort out the situation by shooting everyone. These screens show that levels in *Stranglehold* follow a similar template.

### 2 MID-FLIGHT KNACKS

When gracefully flying through the air, Tequila will be able to interact with the scenery in many and varied cool ways – swinging on a nearby chandelier, for example. He'll also be able to leap onboard moving objects and run up conveniently-placed railings.

### 3 STOP... TEQUILA TIME!

This time round, bullet-time is labelled as Tequila Time™ – something that sounds suspiciously like a Wetherspoons drinks promotion. Still, at least they've mastered alliteration as well as ultra-violence.

### 4 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The Chinese Lantern and Chinese wrong-doer seen here suggest a Hong Kong locale. Tequila will also journey to Chicago, however, when the Russian mafia kidnap his favourite ex-wife and ignite his sio-mo indignation.

### 5 DOUBLE-HANDED DELIGHT

Whenever a game features dual-pistols, whether it likes it or not it's a direct homage to John Woo, which is why Woo himself gracing our monitors is of such significance. We're aware his recent Hollywood films have been shit though.

### 6 REPLASTERING WORK NEEDED

Midway is describing *Stranglehold's* Havok-infused physics as 'rock n' roll' – essentially meaning that everything in the world is destructible if you choose to spray bullets at it. This column being a prime example.

### 7 CALLING CARDS

As well as floaty bits of paper cascading around you, other Woo trademarks to look out for are churches, symbolic doves, evil men who actually aren't, evil and angry police chiefs who shout lots and some cool moves with shotguns.

### 8 GOURAUD-SHADING! 3D MODELLING! ACTION!

Woo himself is directing the storyline, the camera placement and the cut-scenes of *Stranglehold* – and the action couldn't be more his style either. Whether he appears in the game as a wise barkeep as he did in *Hard Boiled* is as yet unknown.





**COMING  
SOON...**

THOSE scary motifs on the cars mean the drivers are really hard.

# FLATOUT 2

**Jon Blyth** puts his pedal to the metal and reverses into a bus queueDEVELOPER Bugbear PUBLISHER Empire Interactive WEBSITE [www.bugbear.fi/flatout2/](http://www.bugbear.fi/flatout2/)**THE LOWDOWN**

Drive fast	✓
Destroy everything	✓
Driver flies out of the car less often	✓
Driver still flies out of the car	✓
Sanctity of the human body cheapened in unacceptable ways	✗

**YOU KNOW THOSE** adverts where it looks like the men are sitting in the pub having a nice pint of lager? And then it turns out, through some twist of metaphor, that they're not in the pub after all – or rather they are, but they just hit a woman (who just stepped in front of their table without looking both ways), and now she's dead with her arm pointing the wrong way? If you saw that advert and thought, 'I wonder how far she'd have gone if that table was going ten times faster', then stop. First, you need to work on your empathy; second, you probably loved the original *FlatOut*.

Unsurprisingly in *FlatOut 2*, developer Bugbear has been upping the destruction quotient – where once there were a mere 3,000 objects to muck up, twat about and smash to bits per level, now there are 5,000. That means there are 67 per cent more things to drive into – as an important statistic, that belongs up there with

'over half of the last 10 per cent of a can of Coke is your own saliva'.

The AI has been improved, too – now, instead of all the non-player cars following the same standard routes, there'll be seven distinct AI drivers to worry about – and all with different personalities and characteristics. If my experience is anything to go by, this will amount to an aggressive Texan guy who goes fast and laughs, a German who takes corners efficiently, a sassy girl in short shorts who playfully drives into your arse, an Englishman who always loses, and... Erm... Grumpy, Sneezzy and Doc. That could be wrong though.

**LOOK AT HIM GO!**

Then, there's the important smashing-your-driver-through-the-windscreen side of *FlatOut*: the ragdoll sports. The little fella will pop out of your car a little less during racing proper, as it did get a bit annoying after a while, but he'll be in and out like nobody's business in the mini-games.

If you love watching double-jointed men with no facial expressions being catapulted into a lake – and let's face it, we're not generally catered for, as a group – then this is your game.

**NOT ALL HAY**

The tracks still include the rural off-road style, but the sequel – thankfully – has more variety. Town tracks give some respite from the dirt, dust and bales of hay, and the design rewards experienced players with manifold short cuts and alternative routes.

The original *FlatOut* was great, destructive fun, and carved out a comfy little niche for itself with the unique use of physics. If Bugbear really has taken it one step further, and addressed the wee niggles of the first (the fairly boring AI, and the lack of longevity in most of the mini-games), then the sequel promises to be, wait for it... Even carbu-better. Hey – it was either that or 'wheelie good'. Be grateful for what you got. **PCZ**

**ETA  
Summer  
'06**



## WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

### BRICK ASTLEY

The first game was set exclusively in rural settings. Now you'll have the chance to drive into shopping centres and dozens of different walls.

### FELLA FITZGERALD

You can't see his mouth, but the AI has improved so much that he's mouthing the words 'Tell Laura I love her'.

### HALF A DENT

Although you're rewarded for destructive play, this particular manoeuvre might be considered over-egging the pudding.

### CHEVRON-NIE BARKER

Chevrons – the friendly elves of the roadside. Telling you which way to go, they're nature's compass, only manmade out of metal and painted red.

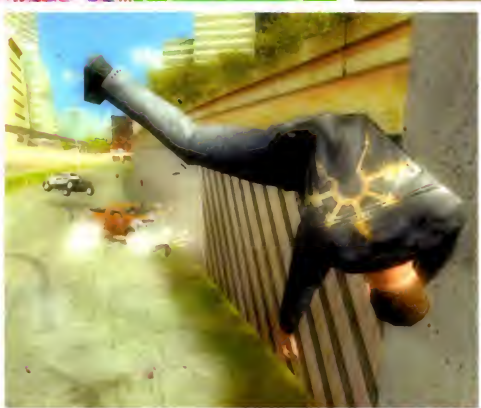
### DEBRIS HARRY

As you drive around the track, your car gets peeled like a victim of ancient and sadistic torture, or an orange. Here, the equivalent of a human finger is sliced off.



If you love watching double-jointed men with no expressions being catapulted into a lake, you'll love *FlatOut 2*

NOT a game to follow the Highway Code to the letter, *FlatOut 2* promises crashes, smashes and bashes.





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**British Airways to axe over third of its managers**  
British Airways (BA) chief executive Willie Walsh. ©AFP/British Airways/File

LONDON (AFP) - British Airways is to get rid of more than one third of its managers over the next two years under a restructuring programme that aims to slash costs across the group.

The job cuts of almost 600 managerial posts, or 35 percent of the total, were set to save the airline 50 million pounds (73 million euros, 86 million dollars) as part of its drive announced in January 2004 to achieve a 300-million-pound cost reduction programme by March 2007, BA said in a statement Wednesday.

The restructuring will see a total of 597 management posts lost by March 2008. The number of senior managers will be reduced by half to 207 and there will be a 30 percent reduction in the number of middle managers to 911 from 1,301.

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**Hurricane Katrina to cost Lloyd's 1.9 billion pounds**  
Residents wade through a flooded street in New Orleans. ©AFP/File James Nielsen

LONDON (AFP) - Lloyd's, the world's biggest insurance underwriting market, raised its estimated pre-tax loss from Hurricane Katrina from 1.4 billion. Lloyd's also forecast that Hurricane Rita would cost it 535 million pounds and that Hurricane Wilma would add 483 million to the total.

As a result, the market said that chances of posting a profit for 2005 were weak.

"The net loss from Katrina is now estimated at 1.9 billion pounds," Lloyd's said Wednesday in an official statement.

"This compares with the provisional estimate of 1.4 billion given by Lloyds on 14 September which was based on the

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**1st March 2006**

Temperature: 7°

Wind: 5mph

Chance of Precipitation: 80%

Weather: cloudy with fog patches

Wind Direction: NW

UV Index: 1

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# MATHIEU!

## WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

*Steve Hogarty's as stealthy as a man with cats for shoes.  
Mathieu Ferland never saw him coming...*

### Who are ya?



**NAME** Mathieu Ferland

**DEVELOPER** Ubisoft

**POSITION** Senior producer

**AGE** 32

**GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE**

*Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield* and

*Splinter Cell*

**FAVOURITE GAME**

*The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*



**Q** How did the *Splinter Cell* concept come about?

**A** When *Splinter Cell* was being conceived, it was sort of a sci-fi game. We had a main character doing all these new and innovative moves, and using futuristic gadgets – it had some potential. It was a shooter with some interesting twists. I got involved with the concept when Ubisoft acquired the Tom Clancy brand from Red Storm. We reckoned it was a good opportunity to integrate the Tom Clancy universe into this game concept, so that's what we tried to accomplish. It turned out that as we adapted all these futuristic gadgets to Clancy's realistic universe – and then when you become a real spy instead of this guy from space – it suddenly made more sense.

***Splinter Cell* used shadows really well – was that planned from the start?**

It was a big revelation with our technology when we developed the light and shadow system. Originally the game was more action-oriented, it was just a shooter, so when we implemented the light and shadow technology we knew we wanted it to be a stealth game. It was just a rough prototype, but we knew it would work at the time. That really focused us and gave us a common vision.

**Did you draw inspiration from other games?**

We drew inspiration from movies as well as other games. We were big *Thief* fans in the office, particularly of the visibility gauges. But when *Metal Gear Solid 2* came out, we were in the middle of production and thought: 'Oh wow, that looks good, what are we going to do?' At one point we wanted to create something similar to that,

## You should try to walk like Sam when he's crouched over – it's humanly impossible

but then we decided against it. We're not here to follow what others are doing, we're here to do something different and hopefully something better than what others are doing.

**What do you make of *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima and his light-hearted digs at the *Splinter Cell* games?**

(Laughs) I have a lot of respect for Kojima. He has a brilliant ability to surprise his fans, like with Raiden in *MGS2*. I thought that was brilliant – having the guts to kill off your main character, even temporarily, that was great. People disliked it because they were attached to Snake, but now it turns out that they have two important characters that they can use and make fun of, like in the E3 trailer last year. When I saw that trailer, I thought it was really funny and very well done. We're flattered to be associated with Kojima's creation. We want to respond to that at some point, but we're just waiting for a good opportunity. (Laughs again, somewhat evily.)

**While we're on the subject, who'd win in a fight between Fisher and Snake?**

(More laughter) That's funny. Umm, it depends on the context really. I mean, I think Fisher is well trained. They don't really live in the same worlds... I mean, Snake's in a jungle...

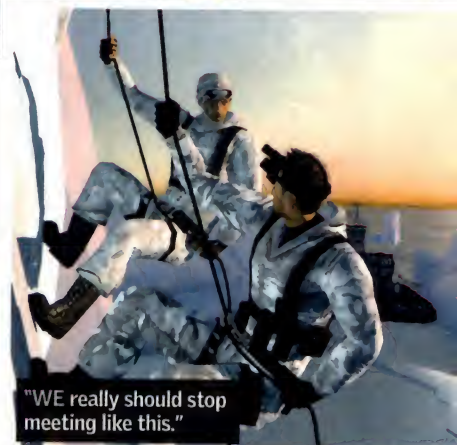


**Well let's say they've had a few pints, and get in a bit of a scrap outside a pub...**

In that case, Sam would win for sure, but they're not really from the same time or place so it's unfair to compare. They really are two very different characters in very different games. Sam's from the early 21st century though, so I guess he'd be better trained.

**Sam's extreme acrobatics are complemented by some amazing animations, tell us a bit about that.**

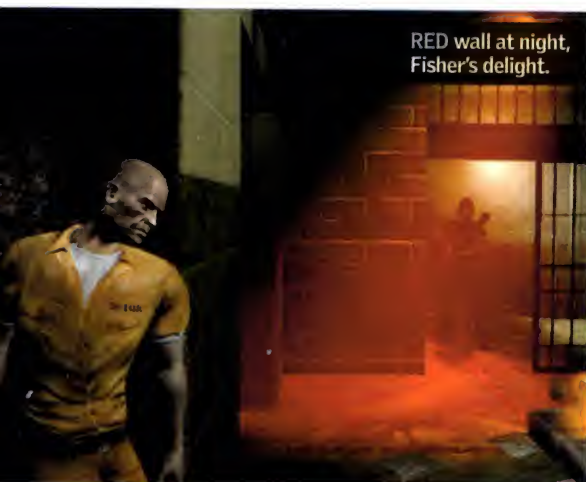
It's cool to see Sam's animation when you're sneaking around – there was no motion-capture involved either. We tried it, but when you want to express an emotion in animation it has to be exaggerated, it has to be theatrical. It's like seeing an actor on stage throwing his arms around with huge expressions to get a feeling across to the audience. You should try to walk like Sam does when he's crouched, it's humanly impossible. The feeling is there though and you feel the cautiousness, you feel that Sam is trying to be careful. Later on, with *Chaos Theory*, we introduced motion-capture for NPCs and other



characters, but Sam himself has always been animated by hand.

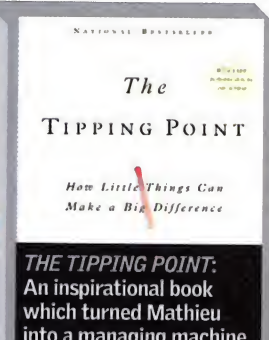
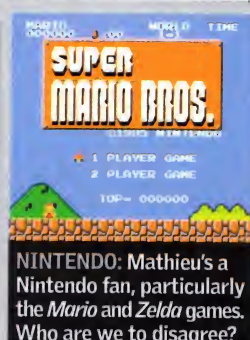
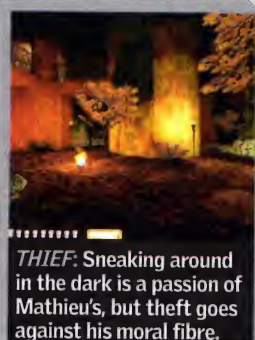
**Was it always planned to make Sam Fisher such a strong character?**

One of our intentions was having a new hero and a new brand, and as the series progressed we began to wonder how Sam was perceived by the players. It turned out that people perceived him as a soldier, so this is why in *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, we want to focus on Sam and make him more central to the experience, showing that he's not just a puppet of the Third Echelon. So he's going through some bad moments in his personal life, he's lost his daughter, he has nothing else to lose. We think he's really going to develop as a character in the latest game. **PCZ**



## MATHIEU FERLAND

### Where he turns for inspiration...





**PCZONE  
CHARTS****ChartTrack**

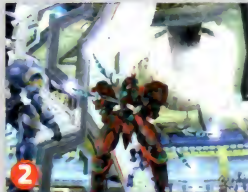
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**STAR WARS:  
EMPIRE AT WAR**

We like it, you love it, but one thing's certain – it's shut down all the garbage compactors... Of our hearts.

**TOCA RACE DRIVER 3**

The third game in the series that lets you feel like a race driver, and third in the charts. Probably because it lets you race lawnmowers.

**RF ONLINE**

The Korean MMOG explodes into our charts, killing four people and injuring many more. We're not sure why it's so popular – it must be the robots.

**TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK**

The city building sim isn't scraping the skies, but it's high enough up the rankings to earn a spot on a knee-high shelf in games stores, if you're looking.



ROGER took seven days to complete the London Marathon.

# REBOOT THE SYSTEM

First information on *BioShock* bobs to the surface from its dystopian underwater lair

[www.irrationalstudios.com](http://www.irrationalstudios.com) | ETA: 2007

**SYSTEM SHOCK 2** is so well regarded among PC gamers that it's nothing short of fanboy abuse that Irrational committed the cruel act of mentioning a spiritual successor, *BioShock*, and then shutting up about it for what seemed like an age or two. Well, the company has just broken its silence, and here's what we now know about the first-person action RPG.

*BioShock* will be set in the 1960s in a giant underwater utopian city encased in a massive glass dome – a bit like a snowglobe except the other way around and without the snow. Built in the 1940s, the city was intended to be a place of ideal serenity for the world's intellectual elite, but as is the way with these things, something went terribly wrong. Twenty years later and the setting for the spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* is now a rusted, crumbling ruin: entire areas are flooded with seawater, and the remnants of a biomechanical mutant army roam the perpetually darkened streets. Children called Gatherers wander from building to building harvesting stem cells from the dead civilians, with massive golem robots called Protectors to keep them safe. All that, and the tap water tastes a bit off. This is set to be a hugely unsettling game.

Unsettling, and very exciting. The AI of the foes you encounter means you can pit mutants against

Protectors, causing a diversion while you kill a pre-adolescent Gatherer for their bounty of precious stem cells that, presumably, you can use for your own growth and development. A bit dark, isn't it? *BioShock* promises to be a game full of choice, so moral dilemmas are just another battle you'll have to face. We can't wait.





## IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



# Science-fiction scriptwriter extraordinaire

JAMES SWALLOW – SCRIPTWRITER AT CODEMASTERS

With an impressive bundle of scripts all scrunched up and tucked firmly under his belt, including scripts for *Star Trek Voyager* and *Doctor Who*, James Swallow is an accomplished science-fiction scriptwriter who's now turned his sights on Codemasters' new sci-fi RTS, *Maelstrom*. Where did this man come from? Where is he going? How big a lunch break does he get? *PC ZONE* finds all this out, and more...

**Q** Tell us how you became involved with *Maelstrom*...

**A** Codemasters was interested in having an experienced scriptwriter involved in the project and it brought me up to the company headquarters in Leamington Spa for a chat. I think we hit it off pretty well early on, as we all seemed to be on the same page as to where the *Maelstrom* storyline was going to go. I came to the attention of the Codemasters gang through previous games scripts that I'd worked on.

**As a sci-fi writer, what does your average day consist of?**

Writing and more writing, pretty much! I spend a couple of hours online (answering emails, researching stuff and so on) and maybe a bit of time playing games, reading or watching DVDs when the day is done. Generally, I work a 10am-6pm day with an hour for lunch, six days a week. I set a minimum word-count or page-count goal for myself each day and work to that. I've been writing full-time now for nearly nine years, and I still get a buzz from making stuff up for a living.

**How did you start out in science-fiction writing?**

I used to write for fanzines and I got to the point where I was good enough to start earning money from it – writing for professional magazines in turn got me credits, and that in turn opened the door to writing books and scripts. I never would have got a chance to write for a *Star Trek* TV show if I hadn't met the producers through writing for *Star Trek Monthly*.

**With *Maelstrom*, how much freedom were you given to write the story you wanted to write?**

The core storyline for *Maelstrom* was a group effort. In the early stages the team at Codies brought me the broad strokes of what kind of plot they wanted, and I in turn offered them ways to open it out and add layers of character detail and background to the world. They've pretty much let me run with it!

**What are your impressions of the game so far?**

I think RTS games need a unique hook to make people excited about them, and for

*Maelstrom* that hook is the dynamic environment. Along with the diverse characters of the three main factions, it's the ability to shift and alter the landscape, the water and even the weather in the *Maelstrom* world that's really impressed me about the game. I'm really looking forward to playing the finished version.

**The *Maelstrom* plot takes its history from here, now, and carries us to Armageddon. How does it feel, scripting our death as a race?**

Ha! Well, I have to admit it's something I've done before (in my *Doctor Who* story, among others). But *Maelstrom*'s story is not really about the end of humankind – it's about the struggle to stop that from happening. The truth is, we live in a pretty grim world in real life (when I was growing up it was the threat of nuclear war – now it's global warming and international terrorism), but I like to think that we're an intelligent enough species not to wipe ourselves out. If *Maelstrom*'s story has a message, it's that if we don't work together, we're going to be easy prey for the first evil alien invaders who happen along...

IT'S basically a less wacky *Perimeter*...



...WITH knobs on...



...AND a good plot.



## LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

If you don't take action now, Mister President, there's not going to be an election. Dammit! I don't care about legislation! That tidal wave of tat will destroy the entire East Coast, can't you understand that? Bah, there's only one thing for it – we must auction off four pieces of tat once a month on eBay in aid of charity. It's the only viable option. Our last hope, lies now, in the hands of the voracious bidding fingers of the internet. Look for our PCZoners tag on eBay and start buying our tat. God bless America.

Buy our tat at [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)  
All proceeds go to charity, mate...  
[www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org](http://www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org)



### THIS MONTH'S TAT



**DUSTY HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 MUG**  
Rinse it out before you put your tea in it.



**SIGNED COPY OF LULA 3D**  
Signed in marker by us, of course.





**DUSTY GTR CAP**  
As worn by Miss Suzy Wallace once, for a minute.



**KING KONG POSTER**  
Stick the big, hairy ape to your wall. It's subtle and tasteful decoration.

### THE TAT BOARD

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	<b>KONAMI SWEATBAND</b> This will helps its foxy new owner look happy and athletic in any situation. A three-quid bargain!	£3.21	3
	<b>NCSOFT CALENDAR 2006</b> If the lithe Elf with the pointy ears says it's April, then it must be April! And if the <i>Auto Assault</i> lady with the big boobs says it's May, it's May!	£5.51	3



### BRIDGE RACER

As peaceful as this scene looks, *Just Cause* is unashamedly about the stunts and the action. Jump out of a plane, parachute onto a car, drive it off a bridge and steal a boat. Then sit down for a second and think about what you've done.

### PLEA FOR CLEMENCY

The weather is real-time – or at least as real-time as weather can be in a 30-minute day-night cycle. So as clouds travel and combine overhead, you might just get a chill in your marrow when a storm's a-brewing.



# JUST CAUSE

**DEVELOPER** Avalanche Studios **PUBLISHER** Eidos

**WEBSITE** [www.justcausegame.com](http://www.justcausegame.com) **ETA** Autumn **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 159

**T**HE FIRST GAME to come from Avalanche Studios is the lightly sumptuous *Just Cause*. Taking the *GTA* template and whipping it over to the jungle island of San Esperito, it starts as it means to go on, with you parachuting in and immediately getting into a gunfight with local cops. This island isn't a peaceful one – there's drug barons and guerrillas battling the authorities, and even the faintest whiff of WMD. On top of everything else, there's about to be a political coup – or at least there will be if you complete your missions. And to do that, you'll need to be fully acquainted with this sprawling beast of a landscape...



An aerial view of a lush green island. A dirt road winds through the lower left. In the lower right, there is a small, simple building with a dark roof. The background is filled with dense green trees and hills under a bright, hazy sky. Three white lines with arrowheads point from text boxes to specific features: one points to a distant mountain peak, another points to a path in the forest, and the third points to the building in the foreground.

### SCALE MODEL

The storyline is set over 1,225 square miles of island, all of which you're free to explore – without loading breaks. With 21 structured missions and 100 side missions, that's an average of 10 square miles per mission. An absolutely meaningless statistic, but a statistic nonetheless.

### GLIDES OF MARCH

There are over 100 forms of transport to get you around, from motorbikes to missile-laden helicopters and mysterious prototype vehicles. Although this isn't actually a hang-glider, it seemed as good a reason as any to mention the transport.

### SETTLE DOWN

As you progress, you uncover over 300 settlements – from isolated shacks like this one, to fishing villages and the island's skyscraper-dotted town. It's also likely to be remembered as 'the game with the brothel in a volcano'.



# SKIP TO THE END...

Simon Pegg bagged a starring role in *Commandos: Strike Force*, so *ZONE* shamelessly used the opportunity to make him our new best friend...



SIMON Pegg, with fetching headphones.

**L**AST MONTH WE met Brian Blessed, this month we met someone even better. That's right: we fired questions at the beautifully peroxidized bonce of *ZONE* hero Simon Pegg: celebrity bastion of scruffy sci-fi fans everywhere, co-creator of *Spaced*, writer and star of *Shaun Of The Dead*, bloke out of *Big Train* and general best person ever. Best.

But why our sudden dabbling in the murky underworld of celebrity? Well, you see Pegg lent his voice (well, we say lent – we assume there was a fee involved) to the neat WWII jaunt that is *Commandos: Strike Force*. Playing one Lieutenant William Hawkins (known by *Commandos* hacks throughout the ages as 'The Sniper'), he was called in to play a man whose origins as a cheeky ragamuffin never diminished while his remarkable skill with a long steel cylinder became apparent – until he finally became a vital

part in the *Strike Force* commando triptych.

As the joker in the pack and a man of maverick tendencies, Eidos decreed that only Pegg, a man who once attacked a zombie with a swingball set, could do justice to such a war hero. Whether or not there's a few easter eggs in *Strike Force* in which Lieutenant Hawkins decries Kiara for being too orangey for crows, or indeed asks Commando Francis O'Brien to do his impression of Clyde the Orang-utan from *Any Which Way But Loose* is as yet unknown. All we can say is that he brings an unsurpassed aura of cheeky-chappiness to his voice-acting. We can also say stuff like "We're not worthy", but that goes without saying.





## The new *Resident Evil* game was a nice evolution in a slightly tired series. Homicidal villagers? I love that shit!

Simon Pegg, *ZONE's* new best friend



**Q** What do you think it is about WWII that appeals so much to gamers?

**A** "I think it's at once contemporary, yet long enough ago to be romantic. Our modern perception of the conflict is now drawn from films and TV, which despite recent more visceral interpretations, still paints it as being a simple war. The enemy was easier to define as aggressive and morally corrupt—we were fighting fascism and fascism is bad. It's hard to romanticise contemporary warfare without cynically exploiting it. I suppose you could have a game where a technologically-inferior opponent is fending off wave after wave of relentless attacks from a vastly superior power. No wait, that's *Space Invaders*."

**Q** How long have you been into computer gaming?

**A** "Probably since the '70s when I was very young and fresh out of the swimming pool, waiting for my mum in the leisure centre foyer, eating salt-and-vinegar crisps, smelling of chlorine and playing *Galaxian*."

**Q** What are you playing now?

**A** "I'm still enjoying *Half-Life 2* – it's the best game I've ever played, so engrossing and wonderfully interactive. It's absolutely head and shoulders above anything else – I love it. To be honest, I haven't been gaming that much recently

as I'm pretty busy. I played four-player *Crash 'N' Burn* round at my mate's house on Xbox the other night, which he projected onto an 8ft screen – that was brilliant fun. I'm not a huge fan of driving games, but it was such a laugh. Elsewhere, I tend to enjoy the solitary danger of the first-person shooter. The new *Resident Evil* game was a really nice evolution in a series which was becoming a little tired. Homicidal villagers? I love that shit!"

**Q** Have you dabbled with multiplayer?

**A** "I've played a few multiplayer games on the PC: *Half-Life* and *Half-Life 2*, also *Jedi Outcast* and *Jedi Academy*. I had a good run on the latter – I just used to jump into the middle of pitch battles and throw my lightsabers around. It was my one perfected special move and it was devastating. That and the old forward roll into a jab. I f\*\*\*ed up a fair few Rodians, I can tell you."

**Q** What do you make of all the haXx0r and their 1337 speak currently favoured by 12-year-olds the world over?

**A** "I find them really scary. When I play multiplayer, I feel like a dad playing football with youngsters in the park. I shouldn't mind that they're better than me, but I do. I get really hacked off when some 13-year-old uses the zero-point gravity gun to chuck a bench in my face and then types 'fck u nuB'. Joining a game is sometimes like walking into a

room full of hoodies and saying, 'right guys, let's steal some mobile telephones'.

"It's a hugely underestimated subculture because most social commentators have no idea it exists. There's an entire synthetic universe of smart-mouthed little thugs out there having the time of their lives. It's the closest reality has ever come to the condition of super-humanity. By day, mild-mannered Timothy Simpkins from Reading (12); by night, a rocket launcher-wielding psychopath from hell, bent on destroying all who cross his path. They should make a multiplayer version of the *Daily Mail*. You'd have a huge online community of outraged conservatives, bemoaning the rise in teleportation and stealth beheadings."

**Q** A few of the current voice actors must be getting a little long in the tooth. Ever fancied becoming the new voice of Master Chief or Sam Fisher?

**A** "Quality of voice-acting is vital. Games can be undermined or ruined by cheesy acting – and by the same token, they can also be improved by good characterisation. Sure, if the right character came up, it'd be fun to do more. I met Shelly Blond who did the original voice of Lara Croft a few years back and I was really impressed. We hung off a wall in an Indian restaurant and made grunting 'effort noises'. That sounds weird; the restaurant was full of people. No, that still sounds weird... **PCZ**"



**TEMPERS ARE FRAYED...**

# WORLD IN CONFLICT

**A multiplayer RTS modelled on *Counter-Strike*? Steve Hogarty has the bomb...**DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment PUBLISHER VU Games WEBSITE [www.massive.se](http://www.massive.se) PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A**WORLD  
EXCLUSIVE!****THE LOWDOWN**

Beautifully detailed	✓
16-player multiplayer	✓
Destructible maps	✓
Huge scale	✓
Perhaps too focused on multiplayer	✗

**ETA  
2007**

**I CAN'T LIE;** the notion of sitting in a room having a conference call with some men from Sweden to discuss their new military-themed RTS doesn't ignite the fires of enthusiasm deep inside my belly. Sure, it sparks a flicker of excitement – just look at these proud guns lined up, with little men running hither and thither and beautifully realistic trees around them – that's glorious attention to detail. Despite this though, my froth glands are distinctly inactive.

Of course, at this point, all we know about *World In Conflict* is that it's a strategy title being developed by Massive Entertainment, the same guys who made *Ground Control*. We also know it's set in a fictional Cold War conflict based partly in US suburbia. Armed with these two flaccid pieces of knowledge, I approach a phone with Martin Walfisz, CEO and founder of Massive, on the other end and speak my questions into it. The answers I receive are set to change my life, forever.

**AND EVER**

Alright, so maybe that's a bit dramatic, but coming from something as far-out as the sci-fi strategy *Ground Control* to the semi-

realistic setting of *World In Conflict* is quite a leap. Not only that, but I'd soon come to learn that the crux of *World In Conflict* comes not in its Cold War setting, nor in its highly-detailed graphics engine. No, the core of *World In Conflict* is a multiplayer concept never before attempted in an RTS. Imagine the multiplayer rules of say, *Counter-Strike* or *Battlefield*, apply them to a strategy game and you'll begin to understand where Massive is trying to go with this. If you're waiting for the proverbial twist, or perhaps a metaphorical hook, or maybe a mixture of the two in the form of some intangible, twistable hook thing, you can relax now.

**GUNS UP**

"The basic core mechanic of *World In Conflict*, keeping in mind that this is a real-time strategy game, borrows heavily from first-person shooter games like *Counter-Strike* and *Battlefield*," begins Walfisz.

"In multiplayer, each player starts on one of two teams, just like you do in *Counter-Strike*, and each team has a deployment zone at one end of the map. When you choose a team, you choose a role such as commanding heavy armour,

leading infantry or perhaps focusing on air power. Once you've picked your role you then buy units, your weapons of warfare basically. And once they're deployed in your deployment zone, let's say five tank units and three infantry units, they're yours to command and move around the map."

**NO 'I' IN TEAM**

That'll be the *Counter-Strike* aspect. Just like in Valve's shooter, *World In Conflict*'s multiplayer consists of connecting to a server, choosing a team, choosing a role and then buying your equipment before you actually play. What this means is that teamwork will be paramount to having an enjoyable game, as just like in real war, a divided army will fall.

Of course, for hermit types who'd rather wage their own wars and not have to depend on other players to co-operate effectively, Massive plans to include standard 1v1 and 2v2 games, but when it's possible to crank the player count up to frenetic 8v8 games, something no modern strategy game has offered before, we don't see why you'd want it any other way.

Massive is also promising multiplayer gameplay which allows people to drop in



THE STORY SO FAR...

**MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT**

**MASSIVE ATTACK**  
Massive Entertainment forms when a bolt of lightning hits some Swedish goop.



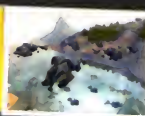
1997

**GROUND CONTROL**  
Massive's action RTS is released. David Bowie is said to be unconcerned by its arrival.



2000

**GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS**  
We doubt Major Tom was a qualified astronaut anyway.



2004

**WORLD IN CONFLICT**  
We're so glad the title doesn't remind us of a song that gets stuck in your head for days.

2006

## It's still a strategy game, but it's unlike all the traditional RTS games that have gone before

Martin Walfisz, CEO, Massive Entertainment



### Some help please When in doubt, it's time to call in the heavies...

"GREAT - the beer's here!"



Just like in Massive's previous title *Ground Control*, you can call in off-screen support and reinforcements as long as you meet certain requirements. Lead designer Magnus Jansen tells us all about *World In Conflict's* Tactical Aid. "You can call in Tactical Aid, like an ace up your sleeve, by earning TA points. We have airstrikes, tankbusters and all sorts of minor and major weapons of mass destruction that you can call in at will. You can drop paratroopers behind enemy lines and other units too. Based on how good you are on the team, you're individually awarded these TA points, like in the *Ground Control* games. If you repair a lot, or support or destroy a lot of enemies, you get TA points."

We like the sound of that, especially the weapons of mass destruction bit. Couple the fact that everything on a map can be destroyed with the possibility of being able to drop a nuclear bomb and we start to get very excited indeed.

and out without being at a disadvantage, again mimicking the online shooter ethos, as well as foregoing the usual RTS grinds of resource gathering and base-building.

"It's still a strategy game," states Walfisz firmly. "However, it's unlike all the traditional RTS games which have gone before, where first you must harvest your resources and construct your buildings, then construct your units, and after half an hour go out and have a battle. Here, the focus is on always being in the heat of the battle. It has the accessibility that a lot of first-person shooters have."

So without resources and bases, what are we left to play with? "The point of each map is to take over what we call command points," Walfisz continues. "These are strategically important positions on the map. The team who controls the most command points will have domination of the map, and will influence a domination bar which moves in favour of the team controlling the map currently. Once the domination bar is fully moved to the left or to the right, one of the teams will win."

"Each map also has a time limit, say 20-minutes, so if after 20-minutes there's no

clear winner, then the team who has most domination on the domination bar wins the map." That's essentially *Battlefield's* ticket-system wearing a wig and a dress if you hadn't noticed, and we're more than happy to see that method being adapted to a different genre.

### GET REAL

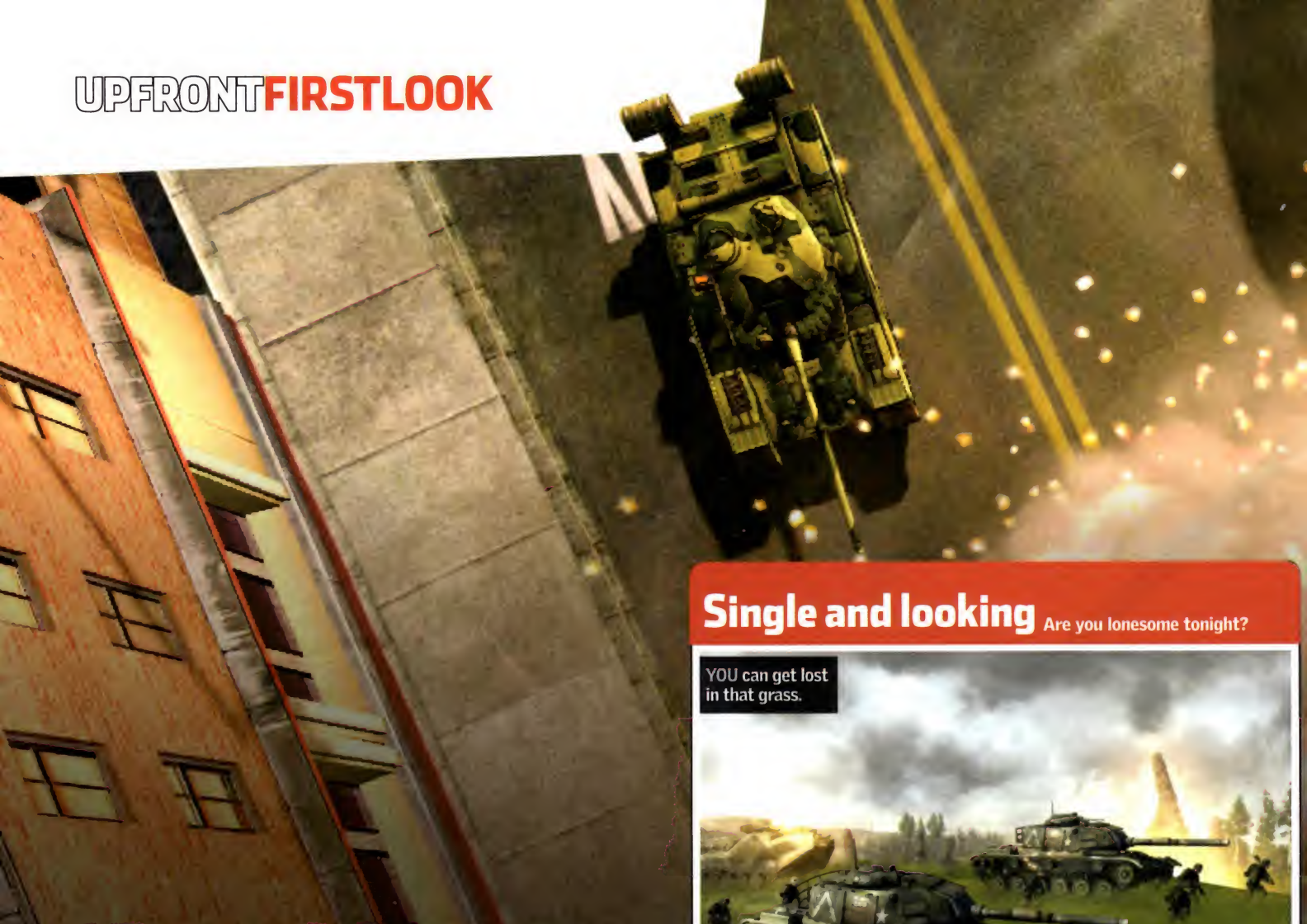
*World In Conflict's* setting is also in stark contrast to the kind of themes Massive has worked with previously. "We've been working on sci-fi stuff since 1997 and so we decided to explore another type of setting," explains Walfisz. "We love sci-fi stuff as much as we love fantasy stuff, but one thing we realised during the years is that it's always great for gamers to recognise new settings."

Massive's previous title, *Ground Control II*, had a great sense of style, with its sci-fi setting and some highly atmospheric locations. It was also a great game to boot, landing a *PC ZONE* award and 84 per cent - another reason to look forward to *World In Conflict*.

"With this new game, one of the key things was to make it open to all," adds Walfisz. "To do that we







## Single and looking Are you lonesome tonight?

YOU can get lost in that grass.



**The game really shines when you start co-operating – the teamplay is definitely the most profound thing about *World In Conflict***

Magnus Jansén, lead designer, *World In Conflict*

WHOOOPS. There's probably an evil dictator living in that house anyway.



Massive Entertainment really didn't have a whole lot to say about the single-player aspect of *World In Conflict* right now. What we do know is that there will be some sort of campaign in there, featuring armies 'from around the globe' (read into that what you will), and weapons which were available at the end of the '80s, like the M1A1 Abraham tank and Apache helicopters. As lead designer Magnus Jansén put it: "We haven't taken any liberties with reality, it's the full arsenal of the existing superpowers at that time – no more, no less."

That's not to say that the single-player side of things is being neglected like some dirty orphan: Massive has an extremely high-profile writer working on its script and an alternative Cold War reality setting, rife with potential for political subterfuge and cunning plot twists. We'll surely get more single-player details soon, but for now Massive is firmly backing its multiplayer content first and foremost.

THERE goes the kitty hospital.







"WATCH out for that picket fence sarge, it's pointy."

realised that the setting should also be really accessible and understandable from the beginning – basically, *World In Conflict* is something that people can recognise right away. That's why we chose the contemporary suburban setting."

I nod at the speakerphone in a pointless gesture of agreement – the sprawling neighbourhoods and parklands of 1989 America really are an original location for an RTS game. But why the Cold War? And what's going on?

Walfisz continues: "We looked at all these other historic games and then looked at what our interests and the team's interests are. We felt the Cold War era really hadn't been explored in strategy games before. Also, we're dealing with modern-day units but not today's units, so we have some historical elements. The more we thought about it, the more we realised it's a very interesting, untapped era. Even though it's a fictional scenario, it's not an outrageous scenario, there's no humour or irony in the setting."

## THEY BLEW IT UP

Besides its radical new approach to online strategy, Massive is also touting its entirely destructible environments. Lead designer Magnus 'Soundboy' Jansén explains: "Everything is dynamic and destructible – if you blow up building blocks, houses and forests, it actually updates the path-finding for the units. So you can napalm a strip of forest and go through there with your tanks. You can blow up a bridge and cut the enemy off, it's very dynamic and everything's destructible. It's not just for show, it actually affects gameplay."

"We enhanced the destruction too, in that when all the massive bombardment takes place everything changes. When all the forests are burned down, it's charred and black, the clouds turn dark and everything's gloomy. So it

can turn from happy suburbia to post-apocalyptic nightmare in just a few minutes."

## BACK TO BEDLAM?

Already, it's becoming apparent that *World In Conflict* will be a title to look out for, a guinea pig for a new mode of multiplayer strategy gaming. And while it certainly is original, it remains to be seen how well it works in practice. Sixteen players on a single RTS map? There's potential for mindless bedlam here if Massive doesn't get it right.

Jansén intervenes: "You can play a normal deathmatch and treat it like *Counter-Strike* where people don't really work as a team. But the game really shines when you start co-operating, communicating and working together. That's the main feature, we're aiming for bigger teamplay games and teamplay is at the core – it's been there from the very beginning. We have other features which are unique and amazing like the cool destruction, but the teamplay is definitely the most profound thing about *World In Conflict*."

Consider our belly-enthusiasm kindled, stoked and blazing then. It's a bit like that



"IF you don't keep quiet back there I'm turning this chopper around, I swear!"



NOT the puppy orphanage!



episode of the A-Team where BA Baracus promised Murdoch he wouldn't call him a fool any more, and then right at the end of the episode, BA Baracus called Murdoch a fool. Except we're Murdoch and BA Baracus is Massive and the word 'fool' is the concept of a strongly team-based and action-orientated multiplayer strategy game.

In short, it's a pleasant surprise to see *World In Conflict* put a spin on the tired multiplayer concepts of RTS games in general, and we look forward to seeing whether Massive can make it sink or swim. **PC**

THE Animaniacs are in for it now.





# LETTING OFF STEAM

The age of digital distribution is upon us – but are we ready for it?



**U**PON THE RELEASE of *Half-Life* in 1998, Valve became one of the most important developers in the world pretty much overnight. Then, ushered in with the goliath that was *Half-Life 2* in 2004, came an unexpected face – a digital download service, without which Gordon Freeman's continuing adventures could not be appreciated. There was confusion in some parts, welcome in others and a smattering of vociferous disappointment from those without Internet connections. But change was here, and so was Steam – both here to stay.

Now the dust has settled, independent developers are beginning to thrive on the service and a new era of episodic gaming is in the offing. We're so intrigued by the prospect that this month, we've dedicated 20 pages to discover some of the amazing games that it's channelling in our direction, and examining what it means for the future of PC gaming. Should grumpy gamers let off Steam? Let's find out...





## VAPOUR WARES

### Will Porter questions Freeman curator and Valve marketing man Doug Lombardi on the origins of Steam...

**Q** At what point and why did Valve decide to make the leap into digital distribution?

**A** "After shipping a number of multiplayer games, like *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress*, we wanted to solve a number of issues to improve customer experience. We'd done simple advancements such as including a server browser within the game itself that, at the time, was a nice step forward in putting players together. But, as online gaming grew, it was obvious that features like auto-updating and more sophisticated anti-cheat measures were going to be requirements. We couldn't find an existing solution for these issues, so we started development internally."

**Q** To an outside observer it seems that Valve saw which way the wind was blowing in terms of digital distribution, and got in before the competition. How important was it to become the first developer/publisher to fully embrace Internet game delivery?

**A** "For us it was really just a set of things that were necessary, things that would make the overall experience of playing (and developing) our games better. Before we began development on Steam, we contacted many other companies to see if anyone had something similar to Steam already in development. We were surprised to find that, while folks were pursuing some of the individual features such as delivering bits via secure, online commercial means, no-one was pursuing the collection of the pieces we had in mind. What's odd is that statement might still be true today."

**Q** As a developer and now self-publisher, what are the main benefits of having a service like Steam?

**A** "In the 16 months or so since *Half-Life 2* was made available, we've delivered a litany of new *Counter-Strike: Source* content, *Half-Life 2* Deathmatch, new *Half-Life 2* Deathmatch content, *Lost Coast* (which added HDR and Commentary to the Source engine), *Day Of Defeat: Source*, and new *Day Of Defeat: Source* content. The majority of this was free of charge to any owner (retail or Steam) of *Half-Life 2*. Right

now you may be saying, "Well, Valve released a bunch of free stuff for *Half-Life* owners – what's the big difference?" Simple. For the Steam customers, the existence of these new games was made readily apparent via their Steam Games menu, and they could be accessed and launched by simply double-clicking on their respective icon. That's light years from, 'Issue press release, place file on FTP, pray everyone hears about it and gives it a try'."

**Q** Is it feasible anymore to be an established gamer without an Internet connection?

**A** "In certain genres and on certain platforms, I'm sure it is. But in an age of integrated wireless on the majority of new devices, and service charges becoming more and more affordable, I think the idea of gamers not being connected is pretty quickly becoming about as common as gamers without 3D acceleration."

**Q** So what's the process by which a game is marked out for digital distribution? What's the quality control?

**A** "Folks contact us (email lombardi@valvesoftware.com), or sometimes we'll hear about something and make the first approach (*Rag Doll Kung Fu*, for example). There's a group of folks here at Valve that work with the studios and publishers from that first encounter, through launch and into the post-launch "phases. We're simply looking for games of interest."

**Q** In your opinion, what does the introduction of services like Steam mean for talented independent game developers?

**A** "*Rag Doll Kung Fu* was shown at last year's GDC as an independent project that Mark and his friends were pursuing at weekends. It was launched on Steam and soon found its way into

retail boxes on many European shelves. Tripwire shopped *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* to every publisher under the sun: no takers. The company signed on to offer the game via Steam, issued a press release and publishers started calling; now it's heading to retail shelves as well. These examples (and some more on the way) say it all."

**Q** Is it a good feeling having a gaming legend like Warren Spector on the Steam roster?

**A** "C'mon... A baby could answer that one!"

**Q** What's the next major update we'll see in the Steam Service?

**A** "More games. Additional payment methods. More things like the *DOD: Source* Free Weekend."

**Q** And in five years' time? What kind of things will be on offer?

**A** "I'm not sure – it's really had to say. But we're going to find out..."







CITADEL OF CHAOS...

# HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

Talking exclusively to Valve, *Will Porter* is the right man in the wrong place who makes all the difference...

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve/EA WEBSITE [www.half-life2.com](http://www.half-life2.com) PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 162



## THE LOWDOWN

- A continuation of the best shooter in existence ✓
- New and improved Alyx ✓
- Mysterious new third axis of power in the *Half-Life* universe ✓
- Answers old questions, asks new ones ✓
- Episodic formula means it'll be a mite short ✗

ETA  
Spring

**T**IME WAS FROZEN, Alyx was in danger, there was a blinding light and the G-Man whisked us away before disappearing. The colours faded into darkness and we were left alone. But not, it seems, for very long.

We begin where we left off: there's a Citadel crumbling around us, a city lying in ruins around it and a damsel that needs relieving from an element of distress. Even though we'd never say that to her face. There aren't too many damsels that pack as much firepower as Ms Vance – and this time round, Valve is promising that she'll have even more kick to her... But let's get down to it: what do we know about this episode, once an expansion? What bedazzling nuggets of previously unheard wonderment did we extract from Valve designer Robin Walker in our cosy tête-à-tête?

As you may know, *Episode One* plans to peremptorily remove Freeman from stasis apparently way before schedule – starting the very instant that *Half-Life 2*

ended. From here runs four to six hours of densely packed *Half-Life* wonderment – in typical fashion raising as many questions as it provides answers for, but addressing, in the words of Walker: "What exactly happened to the Citadel after that big explosion? Is Breen dead? And what is the G-Man's involvement in all this?" The Citadel is about to be taken out in characteristically spectacular fashion – and is due to take the remnants of City 17 with it.

*Episode One* will therefore see a mad dash through the crumbling vaults and towers of Breen's former administration building, before showcasing its wrecked environs: awash with Antlions that have flooded into the wrecked city, panicked Combine troops and pockets of humans desperate to escape. Kleiner, meanwhile has hacked into the Citadel's propaganda network and his face replaces the chiselled, furry jaw of Breen on City 17's manifold screens – delivering his own brand of dire warnings and crackpot

theories, while on-screen violence between the resistance, enemy troops and the Antlions continues to erupt.

## AXIS OF EVIL?

It's at this point, however, that we come across a revelation: there's some new faces in the ascendancy. "*Episode One* marks the rise of a third power in the *HL2* universe and one that'll have a large impact on Gordon's future," explains Walker as we bring a crowbar to his usually tightly-shut jaw. A third power? The Vortigaunts? Well, Walker has elsewhere confessed to us that the doleful beasts will "play a very important role in what happens in later episodes" rather than initial ones, so a pro-active green energy burst from them is perhaps unlikely. Who then?

It could be an axis of power never seen before. Or, if we move slightly into conjecture, it could be the Combine themselves – pan-dimensional creatures such as that of the monstrous visage



## THE STORY SO FAR... VALVE SOFTWARE

### BEGINNINGS

Gabe Newell and Mike Harrington found Valve and set about creating the first *Half-Life*.

1996

### GORDON'S ALIVE

*HL* becomes the best FPS of modern times. There's an excellent bit where you're on a train.

1998



### SOURCE OF WONDER

*Half-Life 2* hits E3. Unreleased till 2004. PC ZONE proceeds to give it a clonking 97%.

2003

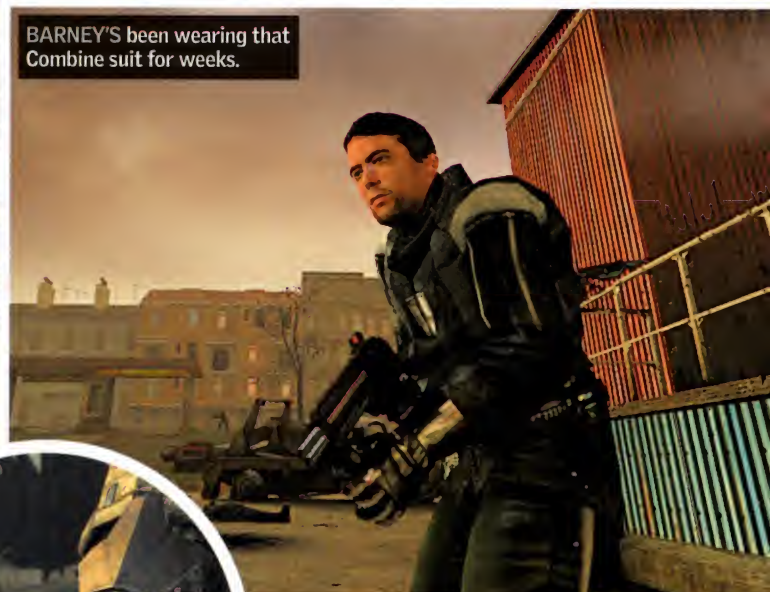
### ENTER AFTERMATH

Valve announces *HL: Episode One*, then changes to the slightly duller-sounding *Episode One*.

2005



"PULL!"



BARNEY'S been wearing that Combine suit for weeks.



ANTLIONS come looking for food, friendship, love and maybe more.



A girl and her dog. It's purely platonic.

that we saw promising Breen a host body in the closing moments of *Half-Life 2*.

Our evidence for suggesting this lies in what Walker tells us next. "The Combine aren't happy with Breen's failure to deal with Freeman and the Resistance. In *Episode One*, you learn some of the ways in which they're starting to take things into their own hands, none of which is good news for Gordon and Alyx."

Don't forget, headcrabs perhaps aside, none of the creatures who met the pointy end of your crowbar last time were of direct otherworldly (or indeed other-dimensionally) origin, instead manufactured by Breen in the Citadel using the Combine technology granted to him in Xen's side of his Faustian pact. Voluntarily or extremely involuntarily, the soldiers, zombies and Citadel stalkers are all adapted humans: biological, mechanical and tech-hybrids pumped out by the monolithic Citadel. The only things you see crossing the inter-dimensional divide in *Half-Life 2* are the

two Combine gunships that come through the portal Breen is attempting to escape through at the game's close. If the Overseer's true overseers are taking matters into their own (spiny) hands, you can expect a fair number of creatures making a similar jump in the hours after the close of the original game.

## GIRL POWER

What Valve is really priming in this new era of episodic *Half-Life* though is Alyx. Lovely Alyx. "In *Half-Life 2*, Alyx was helpful mainly because of what she said," explains Walker. "In *Episode One*, she's helpful because of what she does. After you've fought the Combine and other enemies with her at your side, you won't want to go into battle without her."

Whereas Alyx's former appearances were by-and-large plot-driven and reserved for periods of relative inaction, she's now in the thick of it and by your side for pretty much the entire span of the episode. "She'll protect you more

**After you've fought the enemy with Alyx at your side, you won't want to go into battle without her again...**

Robin Walker, designer, Valve



## But does it come in a box?

EA put it on shelves, Valve puts it on Steam



You'll need an Internet connection to run *Episode One* as it'll need Steam (obviously). However, members of the 'Hey Hey 56k' crowd need not despair, since Valve has struck a deal with EA that'll see full copies of *Episode One* adorning shelves of gaming emporiums up and down the country. Exact pricing is as yet unconfirmed, but it'll certainly be around \$1999. With favourable current exchange rates, this means it'll certainly be a nice bonus for us UK-ites. If you're mad and haven't played the original game, you'll be able to play *Episode One* as a standalone game – and it'll come packaged with *Half-Life 2* Deathmatch and a Sourced-up version of the original's Deathmatch to boot.

often than the other way around, but you do need to keep an eye on her," he adds, pre-empting our unconscious knee-jerk response to those hated FPS levels in which you have to babysit flailing female NPCs. "Many of the problems you encounter in *Episode One* would be too much for any one person to deal with, even if they are Gordon Freeman."

This more active feeling of combat camaraderie isn't simply reserved for the sexy be-hooded one either – Barney will be there to help out with the street-fighting, while Dog makes an appearance at the start – in Walker's words, showing up "long enough to be very useful".

In terms of enemies, the previously unassailable Stalkers seen manning the Citadel in *HL2* will make a confirmed reappearance. What's more, Alyx isn't the only character to have learned new tricks, with enemies both old and new packed with a fair number of surprises.

### MR DE'ATH I PRESUME?

Overall in *Episode One*, there's a real feeling that Valve is trying to streamline the "action bit, quiet plot bit, action bit" pattern of *Half-Life 2* – using a sparkier Alyx with a few new talents to make the whole experience a more organic one, melding an already successful formula into a much more densely packed and closer-knit experience.

As for the supporting cast, Walker adds: "The people Gordon met in *Half-Life 2* are facing new challenges, and the resulting events won't leave them untouched." Really? That sounds pretty personal. Could we be on the brink of seeing the first death of a main *Half-Life* cast member? Don't rule it out...

"TAKE that you one-eyed twat..."



THESE ones look like angry pillows.



But away from such pontificating, why the sudden shift in gears to the episodic format? Won't the move to shorter four-to-six hour bursts of Freeman action piss off gamers more used to their videogame violence in more substantial chunks?

"We've certainly shifted gears in one way – we want to deliver experiences more often to our customers," explains Walker. "It took us about five years to deliver *Half-Life 2*, and we decided we just had to improve on that amount of time. We're pretty sure players will appreciate being able to return to the *Half-Life 2* universe more often, even if each of these experiences is shorter than the average traditional game."

What with *Episode Two* in simultaneous development (perhaps, the cynic within us suggests, formerly being the second half of *Aftermath*), the first two Steam deliveries can be expected to appear in relatively quick succession – at least in terms of the usual turnaround it takes for a *Half-Life* game to appear.

"We've found episodic work conditions to be easier than five-year projects," continues the Valve man. "At

this point we have really well-developed tools, a lot of knowledge in the use of those tools, a world-class engine and a clear sense of what our players enjoyed in *HL2*. We had absolutely none of those things when we started out on *Half-Life*. As a result, we've been able to spend all of our time focusing on delivering a densely packed experience throughout each episode."

### LIKE A CANDLE

Slightly barny fisherman aside, the two biggest introductions in the free *Lost Coast* download are also set to take a starring role. High Dynamic Range lighting, last seen making an Orthodox church look very pretty, will use and abuse the smoky, particle-filled air that signals both the Citadel and City 17's demise, so you can guarantee that the sun will be the haziest of recent times.

Second, the developer commentary nodules that allowed you to listen to Valve's art bods prattle on about the scenery you're lacing with bullet-holes will also make a grand reappearance. What's more, they're far more tightly packed this time if you're feeling



BET she uses Clinique.



Those Gordon met in *HL2* are facing new challenges, and the resulting events won't leave them untouched...

Robin Walker, designer, Valve

## Catwalk City 17

Where did she get that hat? Where did she get that hat?

I don't know about you, but I'd really like to dress my girlfriend up like Alyx and get her to shoot things. Failing that, I'd at least like to wear the Black Mesa hoodie she sports myself. This then, is a direct plea to Valve to kickstart the manufacture of Alyx's clothing and to send me some for free (seeing as it was me who came up with the idea). When directly questioned on where Alyx's hoodie could be purchased, Robin Walker laughed it off saying: "Is Harrods out of stock?" This is clearly not good enough, and means that the papier-mâché HEV suit I've been painstakingly building for myself has become largely redundant. For shame.

THE ultimate in nerdy apparel.

TRIGGER-happy Alyx shoots yet another suspicious-looking cobblestone.

inquisitive, are particularly nerdy or are simply playing through for the fifth time.

### BACK FOR GOOD?

*Half-Life 2* is, was, and for a long time will be the greatest shooter available on PC – and despite its short stature (clearly a cross that we'll have to learn to bear as episodic content becomes more and more prevalent), *Episode One* remains firmly ensconced at the top of our *Chock-A-Block*-style hype machine.

There's a huge amount that Valve is keeping back, preferring you to discover it on your own terms rather than in the oily words of a journalist like me, but we're undeniably on the verge of the most densely packed and well-thought out *Half-Life* experience to date.

At *Half-Life 2*'s close, the G-Man told you he'd received some interesting offers for your services and that ordinarily, he wouldn't contemplate them, adding "these are extraordinary times". A lot is due to change in the *Half-Life* universe and Valve can't wait to tell you about it. Have allegiances shifted, or is it business as usual? Time will tell. Wake up Mr Freeman. Wake up and smell the ashes. **PCZ**

EVEN though they try to ignore them, the Stalkers really creep the Combine out.





IT'S A BUST...

# SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE

WORLD  
EXCLUSIVE!

*Martin Korda* heads off to Dallas for some hands-on time with buxom babe *Elexis*. His wife will be informed shortly...

DEVELOPER Ritual Entertainment PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE [www.ritual.com](http://www.ritual.com) PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 166

## THE LOWDOWN

Utilises Valve's stunning Source engine

Dynamically scalable difficulty system that moulds itself to your playing style

Hugely challenging FPS action complemented by an intriguing plot

It only costs 11 quid

Perhaps a few too many strategically-placed exploding barrels



ETA  
May  
'06

**T**HE WORDS EMBLAZONED in red ink on a well-used whiteboard read: "Welcome *PC ZONE*. Have fun sinning!" Contrary to what you might think, I'm not in an Amsterdam brothel holding a fist full of twenties, but rather in Ritual Entertainment's Dallas offices about to have the world's first playtest of *Emergence*, the opening instalment of *Sin Episodes*, the other episodic, Source engine-driven FPS that'll be downloadable via Steam.

*Emergence*, the follow-up to the original *Sin* (released way back in 1998), sees you reprising your role as John Blade. As the commander of freelance security force HardCorps, you must protect the people of Freeport City, who are being threatened by the dastardly plans of brilliant geneticist Elexis Sinclair, who also happens to be the head of the powerful and corrupt SinTEK corporation. A woman of many talents, Elexis not only possesses breasts you could hide a herd of cattle in, she's also hell-bent on advancing human evolution through genetic mutation. And you're (or for this playtest, I'm) the only person who can stop her. Better get to it I suppose...

My eyes flick open. A beautiful, busty woman stares down at me. Am I

dreaming? Has the jetlag from the ten-hour flight overwhelmed me? Wait a minute. There's a bloke here, too.

Pinned down to an operating table I listen intently as femme-fatale Elexis discusses my predicament with Radek, a gruff Ruskie with a comedy porno beard. Their lips move in perfect sync, faces contorting and contracting to convey genuinely believable emotions. Somehow, they've captured me and injected me with a serum of their own creation. But how did they manage to snare the hottest security officer in town? What the hell is this goop flowing inside my veins? How does Elexis not suffer from debilitating lower back pains with a pair that large? All shall be revealed... Eventually.

## GREAT ESCAPE

I pause the game to sup back some much-needed coffee, allowing Ritual's community relations manager, Steve Hessel, time to tell me a little about Radek. "Viktor Radek is the newest face among Freeport's local crime lords," he explains. "Blade suspects that he's somehow tied to Elexis. He's kind of the main bad guy in this episode." Back to the action. Alarms ring out. Explosions burst windows and my captors flee in





## THE BEGINNING

Ritual sets up its base of operations in Dallas, Texas, a hotbed of games development.

1996

## THE ID CONNECTION

Hooking up with id Software, Ritual creates Quake's first mission pack, *Scourge Of Armagon*.

1997



## SINNERS

*SiW* is released to critical acclaim, but is overshadowed by *Half-Life*.

1998



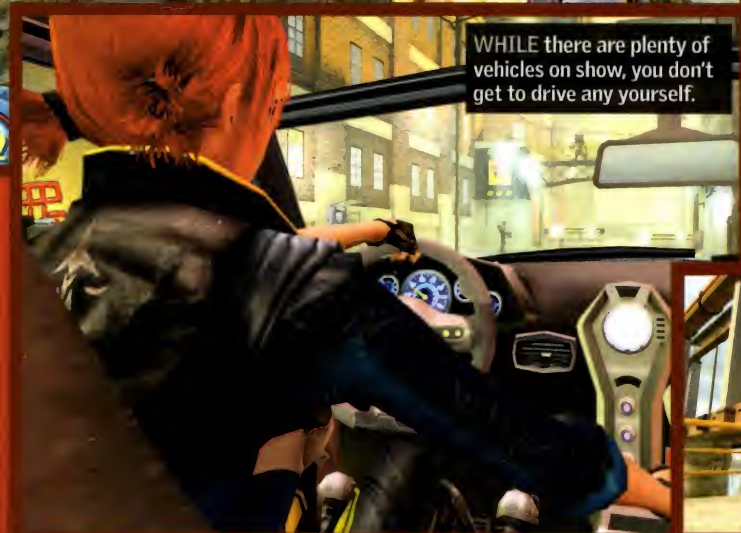
## BOLDLY GOING

The team releases their most high-profile game to date, *Star Trek: Elite Force II*.

2003



ALWAYS a crane spoiling the view.



WHILE there are plenty of vehicles on show, you don't get to drive any yourself.



YOU'D be angry if you looked like him too.



BET those talons tickle.

## Going Green

When seeing the green mist can help you see more clearly



WHAT a lovely set of teeth.

OK, so *Emergence* does seem a tad overpopulated with exploding barrels, but this is offset to some extent by a far more original barrel-orientated feature. Spread liberally throughout the game are green barrels filled with Mutagen (noxious green gas). Fire at these containers and they spew out their contents, poisoning any human who comes into contact with the fumes.

Thanks to the Source engine's versatile physics system, you can pick up these barrels and place or throw them into strategic locations throughout a room. Then, when faced with overwhelming odds, you can backtrack, shooting the containers as you retreat. And with the enemy hot on your heels, it's only a matter of time till they start choking to death. But won't that mean you die too? Interesting you should ask. Y'see, instead of poisoning you, this green mist actually heightens your senses, temporarily placing you into a kind of bullet-time mode. How's all this possible? All in good time my friends, all in good time...

panic as a rescue team storms the building – led by new character Jessica Cannon, a fiery all-action babe with a touch of amnesia when it comes to matters of her past. Lucky she remembered about me, otherwise I'd be screwed.

We charge out of the building. Hopping into a sports car (she drives, as I seem to have left my driving gloves at home) we screech around the city as I pass in and out of consciousness. A momentary dream sequence reveals a snippet of my past: a naked Elexis, waist-deep in a pool of water turns to look me sultrily in the eye.

## MORNING SUNSHINE

I wake with a start, woken by the eager jabberings of JC Armack (a returning character from the original *SiW*, one of *HardCorps*' best technical whizz-kids and with a name of obvious derivations), whose face looms large on a monitor in front of me. He's got a mission for us that just might lead to Radek's capture and, hopefully, uncover some of the blanks from my hazy past.

Radek's been tracked to a derelict tanker protected by a myriad of guards, ceiling-mounted motion-activated machine guns and a few, much nastier

and more terrifying foes. Things are about to get bloody.

I'm in. While Jessica stays in radio contact to keep me updated on any new developments, I head into the boat armed with a Magnum handgun and scattergun – both of which double-up as secondary weapons, thanks to some ingenious alternate fire modes. To the uninitiated, the Magnum appears to be a pistol like any other, firing standard wimpy rounds at a monotonously slow rate. But as I zoom in on an ensconced enemy, I hammer down the right mouse button and send a blue stream of depleted uranium scything through the crate he's hiding behind. He drops lifelessly to the floor: point one to me.

## GUNNING FOR GLORY

More enemies emerge, grunts with machine guns backed up by some mini-gun-toting, heavily-armoured bad boys who spill out of a nearby room and pepper me with bullets, forcing me to cower behind a wall. I lob a couple of grenades at the heavies, and watch with no small degree of satisfaction as their metallic corpses arc through the air in familiar ragdoll fashion.

Switching to the scattergun (a shotgun with a secondary fire function akin to *Unreal Tournament*'s flak cannon), I break cover, blasting a grunt's head at close range. Clearly, *SiW*'s damage model is more regional than a by-election.

Two more enemies take cover behind a wall. Using the scattergun's secondary fire function, I ricochet the weapon's payload off the wall opposite them and straight into their bonces. I grin a victor's grin, turning to the watching Ritual team, basking in my own mastery of the game. A shot rings out. I look back at the screen. I'm dead... And more than a little embarrassed.

But that's the thing with *Emergence*. It's one of the most consistently tricky first-person shooters you're likely to play any time soon; one that'll wear your reload key down to a stump by the time the end credits roll. Be it the jetpack-wearing grunts who meander through the sky and rain down a maelstrom of death on your position, the collection of



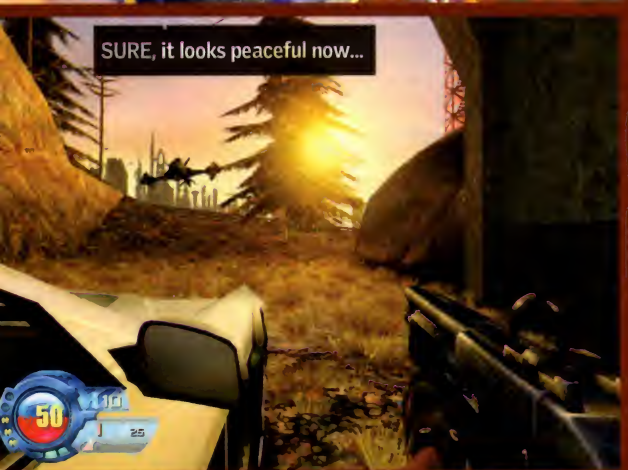
# VALVESINERES:EMERGENCE



JESSICA'S a lovely lass to have around in a scrap.



CHUNKIEST gun ever?



SURE, it looks peaceful now...



THE bosses are gargantuan.

mutated creatures that spit bile, rake at your eyes and kick objects at your head, the behemoth bosses who are as agile as they are powerful, or the legions of enemies that bare down on you as you fire out of the window of Jessica's car during a daring raid on an enemy base, there's never a point where you don't feel stretched to your limits.

## SHOOT TO KILL

In fact if anything, the enemies are still a little too accurate for comfort, hitting me with perfect headshots from the other side of a room even when I jerk from side to side. But with the boys at Ritual promising that the game is still being balanced, there's still plenty of time to get this right before release.

Perhaps the main reason why *Emergence* is so taxing is a feature called





THE better you are, the harder the game becomes.



HIDING was never Trevor the grunt's strong point...

## The next level What's in store in chapter two?



Judging by Ritual's comments, there's plenty to look forward to in *Episode 2*. For starters, some of the questions posed in *Emergence* will be answered, while you can also expect several new, even meatier weapons to make an appearance. Game designer and writer Shawn Ketcherside is also keen to point out just how important the *SiN* community will be in shaping *Episode 2*. "Being episodic, we're able to be far more agile in our response than traditional titles, so expect future instalments to really incorporate feedback from all across the community," he explains. A game that reflects the desires of its users from one section to the next? Now there's a first.



the Personal Challenge System, a mechanic that's been specifically designed for *SiN: Episodes*.

Having just died another humiliating death, I turn to lead programmer Ken Harward who explains how the system works. "Our Personal Challenge System is built to tune itself to your style of play. It monitors your abilities, your movement and how effectively you deal with the obstacles and enemies in the world. The game learns how good a player you are, and can adjust the difficulty level to your skill-set and playing style. There are almost 100 statistics that the game tracks."

Eager to put this bold boast to the test, I give it a try. Running into a room, I carve up the enemy, an angel of death bristling with firepower. All fall before me. I enter the next room, only to be utterly trounced by a legion of mini-gunners. Slapping reload, I replay the scenario.

"This time, I walk in metaphorically handing out flowers to my enemies while reciting sonnets. Moving to the next room, I'm greeted by a pair of standard foes

serving lemonade and Rich Tea biscuits. Well, that's perhaps that's not exactly what happened, but I think you get the point.

### CLIMAX

*Emergence* certainly saves the best till last. The finale proves truly spectacular, a fitting crescendo to the symphony of destruction that precedes it. These final few battles – interspersed with story-driven moments that perfectly set up *Episode 2* – prove brain-bleedingly challenging, forcing me to approach every firefight with forethought and intelligence, despite having Jessica fighting by my side.

It's here that the game's third and final weapon – the assault rifle – really comes into its own, allowing me to spray swarms of enemies with bullets and take out concentrated clumps of foes with well-placed rocket-propelled grenades (the weapon's secondary fire option). Then, after six hours of non-stop action, the slaughter abates.

As I leave Dallas, it's hard not to feel positive about *Emergence's* eclectic mix of

## **Emergence is shaping up to be a lively, challenging and at times exhilarating romp of discovery, carnage, tactics and amusement**

tactics and manic firefights. Sure, it's far from perfect, boasting perhaps a few too many strategically-placed exploding barrels for comfort, and sadly, it slightly under-uses the Source engine's sublime physics system, above all when you compare it to *Half-Life 2*.

But these are more niggles than insurmountable problems. For the most part, *Emergence* is shaping up to be a lively, challenging and at times, exhilarating romp of discovery, carnage, tactics and amusement, filled with some excellent self-deprecating humour, powered by a cool soundtrack and rounded off by an intriguing plot with more potential twists than an '80s perm. If the AI can be tweaked before release, we could be in for one hell of a ride, one so good, it really would be a sin to miss it. **PCZ**





# FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS



*Will Porter* lights up a flickering showreel of other Steam goodness being prepped to come your way...

## ALIEN SWARM: INFESTED

The co-op mod of champions comes of age

**ONCE UPON A** time, there was an overhead squad-shooter mod called *Alien Swarm*. It lived within the guts of *Unreal Tournament* and it was much loved by one and all. Marines were directed through *Alien*-style corridors, ducts and bases, and much bejesus was scared out of one and all.

Now though, the squad at Black Cat Games have decamped to the Source engine and the fightback against the Swarm is set to continue apace. It will be distributed in two legs (one free and another with a price tag and various bells and whistles attached such as extra missions, boomsticks and military personnel). *Infested* is set to follow its mod progenitor with a top-down action route that not only recalls the heady days of *Chaos Engine*, but also brings in a happy element of tactical thinking. Eight-player co-op in *Alien Swarm* was nothing less than a fountain of undiluted joy – we expect bigger and brighter things here.

## WARREN SPECTOR'S SUPER-SECRET PROJECT™

The *Looney Tunes* assignment that gaming's resident insane genius is secretly concocting

**SO WHAT DO** we know about Warren Spector's Super-Secret Project™? Well, we know that Spector is working on a fantasy title that uses the Source engine and that will be distributed via Steam. We also know that Junction Point has been on the look-out for artists who can draw "cartoon mice, cats and wabbits" for a game that's "looking to break all the rules."

We also know that Warren Spector was behind a tabletop role-player in 1984 called *Toon* – in which anvils would regularly land on your head and your avatar would, in true Bugs Bunny fashion, always bounce back and never actually die. *Toon* was a role-player that actively encouraged you to break the traditional role-play format; if something was considered funny it was fair game, and if Spector is recreating it in any way, then you have something to look forward to.

**Warren Spector is working on a fantasy title that uses the Source engine**

AN artist's impression of what the International Space Station will look like.





# PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA

Ahoy thar matey Jim lad! Nautical blah etc

**THOSE WHO PUT** knives between their teeth will be more than catered for by Flying Lab's heftily original *POTBS* – an MMOG that props you up as a captain of a vessel (of either Pirate, Adventurer or Naval Officer leanings), and hurls you into the Caribbean of yesteryear.

It isn't a full-on nautical simulation, although clearly wind and real naval tactics play a huge role, but what really catches the eye is its interesting mix of PvE and PvP combat. Every day your nation (British, French or Spanish) will endeavour to take over computer-controlled ports which, once sufficiently

populated and bombarded, will become full-on PvP areas in which factions duke it out for nautical supremacy. Victory points will be awarded daily to whichever European tourists have the most ports – each nation surging towards a target that makes them outright *POTBS* champions, after which the merry dance begins again in earnest.

Impressively, you'll also have your own personal quests, given to you by a string of NPCs who are cast as your long-lost loves, treacherous friends and favourite second cousins. Plus you can wear an eye-patch. Win all round then.



THE most original Steam game yet?

TOILETS: bastions of the FPS since 1995.



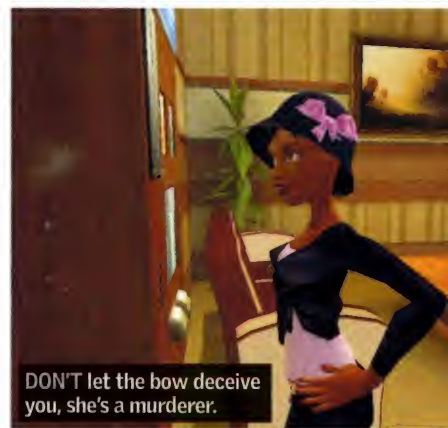
## THE SHIP ONLINE

Death on the Source (engine) of the Nile

**TAKING THE ESSENCE** of an ITV1 Agatha Christie pot-boiler and rubbing it deep in Source engine goodness, *The Ship's* previous guise was as a cult hit *Half-Life* mod. Concocted by an ingenious team in the wilds of Scotland, its beautiful premise is that every player is a would-be murderer on a cruise ship.

The nefarious Mr X has ordered you to take out one of your fellow players, and one of your fellow players has been ordered to take out you. Kill your prey with style and in secrecy and you'll be rewarded; get seen by NPCs brandishing a firearm or wandering around with a bottle of poison and you'll get some unwelcome time in the brig. Intrigued yet? Just remember that you're also expected to eat, drink and make merry on the cruise so as not to arouse suspicion. And that those footsteps you hear behind you could be the sound of your impending doom...

DON'T let the bow deceive you, she's a murderer.



YO HO, ho ho...



A pirate's life for me...

## ZOMBIE MOVIE

Thought Steam was all about games? Think again

**MICHAEL J ASQUITH** and Ben Stenbeck are the sorts of guys you'd like to meet. They're obsessed by zombies; they previously worked as designers and sculptors at WETA Workshop (thanks to whom we have the beautiful *King Kong* and *LOTR* flicks); they're now in the employ of Valve and they've made their own film.

What's more, *Zombie Movie*, a flick that does exactly what it says on the tin, is an (unconfirmed) dead cert for a Steam release. Copyrighted by Valve, the action takes place in 1986 in New Zealand – three blokes are stranded with a 1965 Holden EH Station Wagon that's run out of petrol. Thing is, with a limited supply of nicotine, they might kill each other before the zombie apocalypse does.

THE neverending quest for 'Brains!' continued.

PETER Jackson, eat your heart out.





# RED ORCHESTRA: OSTFRONT 41-45



*Will Porter tracks the happy tale of the mod that came full circle*

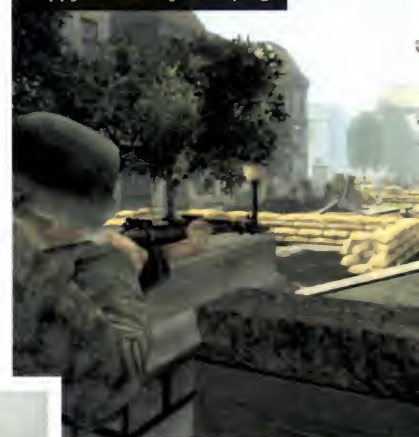
DEVELOPER Tripwire PUBLISHER Valve/Destineer WEBSITE [www.redorchestragame.com](http://www.redorchestragame.com) PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 165

**N**OW FRESHLY MINTED onto Steam, *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* missed our review section by a gnat's breath this month. Its tale is an interesting one. Once (and still) a scintillating Eastern Front WWII *UT* mod in which guns can kill instantly, and bullets, shells and armour all have realistic physical properties, the game's development has now come full circle. For its resounding efforts in mod-play, Tripwire Interactive won Epic and NVIDIA's 'Make Something Unreal contest'. The prize? Well, only a free licence for

both the Unreal Engine 2.5 and Unreal Engine 3, worth a cool \$350,000. Which isn't bad, considering.

*Red Orchestra* has since become a standalone Russian warfare sim on Steam, and has recently confirmed a date with High-Street shelves through publisher pals Destineer. Falling somewhere between *Battlefield 1942*, *Day Of Defeat* and a well-thumbed library book about military engineering in terms of style, it's a remarkably addictive game – and one whose review you'll get to read in these hallowed pages next month.

RUSSIANS only ever seem happy when they're sniping.



"CALL that a gun barrel?  
This is a gun barrel!"





## IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



But how did the *Red Orchestra* Steam release come about? We tracked down Alan Wilson of Tripwire and fired accurately modelled questions at him until his armoured steel defences were realistically broken down...

**Q** So how did *Ostfront* come to be released on Steam? Did you approach Valve yourselves?

**A** "We approached Steam. We'd been in all sorts of discussions with various 'standard' publishers, which can all get very frustrating when you refuse to fit their standard model. John Gibson, our president, had heard news about Valve looking for third-party properties and simply picked up the phone. Valve was immediately interested and listened actively – and the rest is pretty much history."

**Q** What does a service like Steam offer a developer that usual publishing routes don't?

**A** "It was key for us that we retain control of our own property. Valve has no interest in grabbing at the properties it's distributing. You could, of course, wonder if the reasons for that includes its own brushes with publishers and distributors. That ownership and control is really important to a start-up like ourselves, and was always a sticking point with the other publishers – until Destineer came along later, of course. At the end of the day, it means that we'll be able to decide our own destiny."

**Q** Does digital distribution give extra creative freedom to a game's development?

**A** "Well, the Steam deal leaves us with control. Valve has made no attempts (formal or otherwise) to shunt the game into other directions. It's offered some good comments, but that's as far as it has gone. So has Destineer as an aside – proving that it isn't just digital distribution channels that will listen to the developer and make serious efforts to help. Once a large publisher thinks it has control (even in the early negotiations), you find them trying to direct you and push the game to places it wants."

"I'm on record for my views on some of this: throwing money at 'cool cinematics' and other big production values doesn't guarantee a successful game. Trying to shoe-horn a game into a niche it wasn't intended for is unlikely to succeed. Just because a publishing house feels the need for its own WWII

franchise doesn't mean you can make every property fit that mould.

"At the end of the day, we had complete control of the budget – it was completely up to us where and how to spend our cash. If we decided that the game-playing public would rather have a couple more vehicles than some Hollywood star's voice-over, then that's what the game got. We're old-fashioned like that – we believe that people would rather pay a reasonable price for a game that plays really well, rather than a lot of money for a lot of hype."

**Q** What would you say to people who grumble about digital distribution?

**A** "Patience, Grasshopper!" Digital distribution is still a relatively new phenomenon, so the wrinkles haven't all been ironed out yet. For those who just don't like Steam because of the issues it had in the early days, I have to say – try it again now. It works. It's simple. It doesn't have spyware and it doesn't chew up your system. Your games are up-to-date all the time. Of course, there are plenty of people who will struggle – inability to download around 1GB of data in any sensible timescale, or issues with remote payment. This is why we turned to Destineer to get a version in stores – to complete the picture so that no-one has any reason to miss out."

**Q** To us, it seems pretty novel that a game that uses Unreal technology is being released on a Valve service. Have many people commented on this?

**A** "Actually, most of the comment has come down to confusion: people assuming that we've transferred to the Source engine because we're going out over Steam. So far, only those who really watch the industry have commented on the irony of a game built on Epic's technology going out over Valve's distribution service. The views from both Epic and Valve have been hugely supportive too. Epic seems genuinely pleased at the success, and Valve seems really pleased at the property it's getting to distribute. Win all round, I'd say."

## PROBABLE CONTENDERS...

So what else might get a Steam release? Let's have a think...

### THEY HUNGER: LOST SOULS

From the same collective talent that produced the venerable series of single-player zombie mods for *Half-Life*, *Lost Souls* moves the action into the increasingly undead-plagued regions of Eastern Europe in Black Widow Games' first commercial venture. A tale of a 1960s holidaymaker who, perhaps unwisely, takes shelter in a looming monastery rather than call the emergency services after a car crash, its utilisation of the Source engine means that it doesn't take a massive crackle of neurons to wonder if a Steam release might be in the offing as well.

### DEFCON

The next offering from Independent Gaming Heroes™ Introversion, *DEFCON* hasn't yet been proffered as Steam fodder – but the sniffiness of the high street and the renaissance-man reinvigoration we've seen with *Darwinia* surely make it a dead cert. A *WarGames*-inspired game of neon global carnage, its chintzy retro stylings and monumental bodycount should see it fare well come release.

### UNKNOWN MARK HEALEY PROJECT

The lovable scamp who developed *Rag Doll Kung Fu* in his spare time and through various scribbles on the back of cigarette packets (maybe) is up to something. In his own words: "I've left my very comfortable day job at Lionhead to form a new company with some mates, and make an exciting new game, which I can't wait to play. I've also smashed my head on a door, and in the process have gained a permanent action man-type scar on my brow." The fiend won't let on what he's doing – but speculation states that a Steam release is likely.

### NATURAL SELECTION: SOURCE

The ferociously popular *Half-Life* multiplayer mod is definitely coming to Source, and work is definitely afoot in the creation of a made-for-retail *Natural Selection 2* using an unspecified next-gen engine. Either (or perhaps even a coagulated mix of the two) could be expected to surface on Steam – and wouldn't the world be a better place for it? An ingenious mix of RTS and first-person space marine adventure, it currently features an excellent commander system for human (frontiersman) players and some stunning wall-walking, egg hatching and acid spitting on the part of the Kharaa aliens.

### TEAM FORTRESS 2

Wherever could it be? *Team Fortress 2*, the vapourware that isn't *Duke Nukem Forever*, has been in development at Valve since the days of *Half-Life 1* and, as you may have noticed, still hasn't appeared. Net speculation that an official announcement isn't far away remains sketchy – but how far off can it actually be? Perhaps it's set in the *Half-Life* universe, but then again, perhaps not. Perhaps called *Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood Of Arms*, or perhaps not. The only thing we can be sure of is that when it's released, it'll be on Steam...

*DEFCON: Death In Neon.*

PIOTR and Olaf just couldn't stop killing pensioners. The scamps.





# CURRENTLY PLAYING...



**Andy Robinson** sifts through the temperamental love-bucket that is Steam and presents stars to the worthy

## THE USUAL SUSPECTS SOURCE PREMIER PACK - \$59.95

If you don't own them already, get your credit card out



### HALF-LIFE 2 PRICE \$29.95

Seeing as it's the reason that 90 per cent of people have Steam installed, then we're surprised you're even bothering reading about why we've given it five stars. If you haven't played it then we'll send Steve Hogarty round your house, with one of the big cardboard tubes we have in the stationery cupboard. They hurt.

★★★★★

### COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE PRICE \$19.95

The world's most popular action game tarted up with Source engine make-up. Some question quite how it grew so popular – but with such tight, well-loved maps, wonderfully modelled weaponry and engaging teamplay, it isn't going to fade away any time soon. Especially now it's got rolling tyres.

★★★★★

ANTLIONS: fickle beasts, really.



"JOHAN! Don't be a hero!"

### HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH PRICE \$9.95

A game in which technical ability and ever-mounting kills are unimportant, and the ability to kill someone with a flying toilet reigns supreme. Perhaps not one of the most refined multiplayer experiences, nor one with a great many decent maps, but certainly the most consistently funny deathmatch around.

★★★☆☆

### DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE PRICE \$19.95

The (other) little mod that's gone under the Source engine knife, now sporting a proverbial catwalk of good looks. It's not as popular as its *Counter-Strike* cousin, but we never say no to Nazi-shooting – especially if Steve wants a game and he's wielding the cardboard tube.

★★★★☆

### HALF-LIFE: SOURCE PRICE \$9.95

Does the Source engine make *Half-Life* a better game? We think not – shiny as it may look, there's simply not enough here to warrant a purchase. If you want to feel that nostalgia kick in, then in terms of Black Mesa, we recommend the original and the best.

★★☆☆☆



# THE CLASSICS COUNTER-STRIKE ANTHOLOGY - \$19.95; HALF-LIFE ANTHOLOGY - \$14.95

Just like Wayne Rooney, we like a bit of retro

## COUNTER-STRIKE / DAY OF DEFEAT PRICE \$9.95

Controversial, this. A massive amount of people still play 'old' CS - most of them austere types who nit-pick important factors like recoil or simply dislike change. They might not be as pretty as the Source versions, but they've got more maps than their polygon-savvy brothers. Nice graphics give *Source* the win, but they're still the same game.

★★★★☆

## COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO PRICE \$9.95

An absolutely pants *Counter-Strike* single-player attempt that was passed around development houses like a hot potato covered in poo. Coming in the form of *Condition Zero* (essentially pre-Source

single-player CS with 'bots) and Deleted Scenes (the Ritual Entertainment single-player botch job), when compared to vanilla *Counter-Strike*, it's worse than sticking your genitals into a flaming bees' nest.

★★★★☆

## HALF-LIFE / OPPOSING FORCE / BLUE SHIFT

PRICE \$9.95 each

What can we say about the game that started it all? The AI's still rock-hard, the set pieces are still thrilling and it's a sheer must-play. *Opposing Force* is just as good, while Barney's outing in *Blue Shift* may be short and have a hideous ending - but is still a must for the completist.

★★★★☆



## TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC PRICE \$9.95

The team-based multiplayer mod that did the rounds on *Quake II* before being ushered into *Half-Life*, *Team Fortress* is widely seen as one of the best online games ever. It still has rabid support, but hasn't had the staying power of CS. Whether *Team Fortress 2* is just around the corner remains the subject of fevered Net speculation.

★★★★☆



## THE NEW KIDS Classics in the making?

### HALF-LIFE 2: LOST COAST FREE

It may be little more than a tech demo to show off the Source engine's fancy new HDR lighting, but we'd sell our grandmothers to get our hands on a little bit more of *Half-Life 2*. *Lost Coast* features some bonus developer's commentaries, in which jolly Gabe Newell tells us all about the making of the level and perhaps unwisely presents us with his email address. Short, but still sweet.

★★★★☆

### CODENAME: GORDON FREE

Originally a helpful distraction to tide us over until the real *Half-Life 2* arrived, *Codename: Gordon* can't help but charm us with its cute 2D visuals and humorous scientist banter. The game takes all of the things we love about *Half-Life 2* (yes, even the gravity gun) and transfers them to the wonderful world of 2D platforming.

It's not the best thing ever, but still worth the meagre download.

★★★★☆

### DARWINIA PRICE \$19.95

A wonderful strategy/puzzle/action hybrid from plucky UK developer Introversion, *Darwinia* puts you in the service of troubled scientist, Dr Sepulveda. A nasty virus has invaded his virtual theme park, and it's up to you to save the little sentient wonders, the *Darwinia*. This is undoubtedly one of the most unique games available for Steam-heads, and well worth its humble asking price.

★★★★☆

### DANGEROUS WATERS / SPACE EMPIRES IV DELUXE

PRICE \$19.95, \$39.95

The latest addition to the Steam empire are these two oddly placed titles from developer Strategy First. *Dangerous Waters* is a (gasp!) naval strategy game



that puts you at the helm of multiple modern land, sea and air war machines. *Space Empires IV*, meanwhile, is an award-winning galactic affair. For decent strategic entertainment you won't go wrong with either, but they do seem quite out of place among the action-heavy games around them.

★★★★☆

### RAG DOLL KUNG FU PRICE \$14.95

*Rag Doll Kung Fu* is the holy union of ancient martial arts and hilarious, fumbling ragdolls. Controlled entirely using the mouse, the game frees a hand up to do other things, such as ironing or origami. Like *Darwinia*, a game that would otherwise have been ignored has been brought to the masses.

★★★★☆





# THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION



Let's see where this crazy rollercoaster gaming industry of ours is taking us...



NICHOLAS Lovell, MD,  
Lodestar Partners.



TONY Treadwell,  
CEO, GameShadow.

**T**HE TIDE OF online game purchasing is turning – Valve has kick-started the trend. But how much will things change? On the launch of EA Downloader, EA's European vice president of sales went as far as claiming that within the next ten years "all entertainment media will be downloaded to a device" of some sort. Times seem to be changing.

"Digital distribution is about convenience and consumer power," explains Tony Treadwell, CEO of digital game-servicing app GameShadow. "It means innovative and new products will be launched."

"It will definitely be a leveller," agrees Nicholas Lovell, the MD of industry analysts Lodestar Partners. "There'll no

longer be a need to have physical stock and significant financial resources tied up in game boxes sitting in a warehouse. However, marketing will still be expensive, more so than today. In the physical world, one form of marketing is having your boxed game sitting on a shelf in GAME to attract the casual buyer. Reaching that same audience in a digital world is hard."

## THE FUTURE IS NOW

The development of download sites and services that gamers know and trust will therefore be key in the future of digital distribution – and you can expect to see distribution battlegrounds forming online in the coming years. Valve may have stolen a march on its competitors, but with EA and XStream warming up in the wings, it certainly won't be alone.

Episodic content, meanwhile, will also flourish. "It will definitely become more popular," states Lovell, "but it'll require a step-change in the way publishers think about their customers. Currently, as soon as a game is out, that's it. There's no support, no focus on customer satisfaction. When the profits of a company are dependent on consumers continuing to

buy extra content for their favourite games, this will have to change. That will be good news for consumers, but an expensive sea-change for publishers."

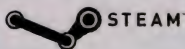
With other obvious benefits lying in reduced levels of piracy and a greater prevalence of anti-cheat technologies, fear of Big Brother-style prying on our machines is rife and justified – look at the clamour when punters discovered what they thought to be spyware in *WOW*. In the meantime, shop sales won't die – look at boxed retail copies of *Rag Doll Kung Fu* and *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* for proof. "30 per cent of all game purchases are gifts," says Lovell. "It's difficult to wrap a digital download. We'll continue to see boxed products, and digital downloads will be focused on new episodes, add-ons and community."

"People still like physical ownership," agrees Treadwell. "Plus, with Blu-Ray/HD-DVD on its way, games are going to get bigger. Games of 25GB are not unfeasible, and that's a big download." Broadband then, for those of us with insufficient funds for such luxury, won't be necessary just yet – but as time marches on it'll become harder and harder to live without it.

**We'll still see boxed copies, with digital downloads focused on add-ons, new episodes and community**

Nicholas Lovell, MD, Lodestar Partners

## OTHER CONTENDERS



Products/services snipping at Steam's heels



### EA DOWNLOADER

Currently packed with *Battlefield 2* and awaiting the *Sims 2* landslide, it's a tad bare bones at the minute, but due for expansion.



### XStream

Quite quiet these chaps, but the company has *Prey* signed up for digital delivery, so expect to hear a fair amount more once it hits.



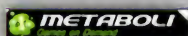
### GameShadow

A service that gives you a firm nudge whenever patches and updates are released for your games, GameShadow isn't bad at all – if you don't mind having your hand held.



### Vapour

A mod-minded application that updates your favourite bedroom creations, Vapour works as a fairly decent shit-filter to boot.



### Metaboli

Essentially the download equivalent of your local Blockbuster, Metaboli hires out games through broadband. Can't play mods on it though.





## YOUR SHOUT!

The manifold voices of the *ZONE* readership unleash their inner-most feelings on Steam. Stand well back...

### THE GOOD

It's a fantastic tool for up-and-coming indie developers like Tripwire. You can get a game exposed to a lot of people while still reaping the rewards. Normal publishing deals can leave the developer with no profit at all.

**Funkyjack**

I believe that this could allow the developer to become freer of the publisher's grip, and allow creativity and visionary ideas to flourish instead of being stifled.

**G\_Man\_007**

I've not got a problem with it – automated patches and updates are a nice feature. I like the fact that it lists mods for games and lets you download them – even if the selection is limited.

**Bruno0091**

### THE BALANCED

It's nice being able to get a game updated without searching for a patch – but on the flip-side, it's a real pain if you have a slow connection.

**moby\_matt**

If this is the way of the future, then how many other delivery systems will we have to have running on our rigs in a couple of years' time?

**bagsabbis**

At times, brilliant. Valve has hit on a great idea that will change the way we buy and play games. But when it performs updates every three seconds, it's frustrating.

**AJ**

I hate Steam, but I still use it along with many other critics, because we enjoy the games it allows us to play.

**Reverend\_Joseph**

### THE UGLY

I bought *Half-Life 2* in November 2004, owned the DVD, but couldn't actually play it until January 2005 due to all the problems and Steam's refusal to allow any leniency. You play the game Valve's way or you don't play it at all.

**The Tingler**

It's just like communism – inspirational in theory, terrible in practice.

**wiz**

Logging into Steam for a single-player game is a joke without a punchline.

**Corporate\_sniper**

It's another brick in the wall dividing the haves and have-nots. If you don't have a credit/debit card, then even if you have Internet access, the new stuff on Steam might be the greatest in the world, but you can't get it.

**Andy\_Monahan**

## OUR SHOUT!

*Will Porter* explains his curious relationship with the little black application that lurks on his desktop...

**T**HE CHAPS AT Valve are clever buggers you know. They saw which way things were going. They saw that established game publishers were going to take an age to truly adapt to the age of broadband, so they leapt right in. Obviously, it wasn't the cleanest of landings – several thousand forum posts can attest to that. Steam stuttered at a couple of the first hurdles what with the massive demands placed upon it, and those without Net connections were rightfully miffed. What's more, a few legal teams made a fair bob or two when the games industry proved rather unpliant when it came to the increased developer control (and profit) that Steam ushered in. The whole farrago provided further evidence that publishers simply weren't ready to cope with what Valve was diving headfirst into.

But by tying Steam to the most-anticipated PC game of all time, Valve guaranteed itself a presence on PCs worldwide. It was an audacious move – and, I'd argue, it was an extremely good one for PC gaming. Yes, I know Steam

can be a fiddle, but in terms of providing us with a constant stream of games that would otherwise have struggled in the shops (*Darwinia*, anyone?), then Steam is a really, really good thing. All of a sudden, meddlesome middle-men publishers can be sidelined – and risky games can be made and promptly delivered to a ready-made audience likely to appreciate them.

Take *Deus Ex: Invisible War* (and I mean take it, please). If that's not a game where the vision's been compromised by publisher meddling, then I'm the uncle of a proverbial monkey. But now, through Steam, a true videogame auteur like Warren Spector can create his game with no threat of intrusion. The other day I heard a rumour that Frederick Raynal was thinking about making *Little Big Adventure 3* – a few years ago I'd have just thought, "No-one will publish it. Never gonna happen." And cried. But now, with Steam and digital distribution, it honestly seems like a viable possibility.

Digital distribution is coming whether we like it or not – so who

would you rather be the one cracking the whip? Microsoft? EA? Or a company that's a developer itself, that consistently knocks out award-winning games? I know which one I'd prefer.

It certainly doesn't look like it, and at times it certainly doesn't feel like it, but Steam is a taste of the future – and as more games are announced and the system gets tightened, it'll get better and better. And let's face it, as long as Valve keeps on producing the greatest gaming series of all time, we'll all use it anyway. Clever boys, aren't they? **PCZ**





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PCZONE

## REVIEWS

Scaling the heights of PC gaming

REVIEWS EDITOR Suzy Wallace

## She'll go far

**T**RIUMPHANTLY WIPING THE floor of unbelievers with the help of my trusty green-skinned, orange-haired freak of nature Blanka in the *ZONE* office *Street Fighter* competition; getting the entire population of my home town to laugh at my farts in *Fable*; and proving I'm no ordinary woman driver by showing the *ZONE* boys just how a car should be driven when we first got our hands on *GTR* (namely sideways). Yes, there have definitely been some high points to my gaming career.

However this month, I've managed to add another to the list. Achieving it has required a mix of skill, stealth and perseverance, and should be rewarded with some kind of gold-plated certificate. Yep, nearly two years after its original release, I've finally completed *Far Cry*. And you thought Royal Mail was tardy...

If you're looking for the *Tomb Raider: Legend* review, unfortunately you won't find it in this issue. Final review code just wasn't ready in time – and as we're certainly not prepared to review from unfinished code, you'll have to wait until next issue to read our definitive verdict on Lara's latest outing. Make sure you don't buy a copy until then...

## Must Buys!

**PC ZONE Classics** are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



GAME OF THE MONTH

68

## THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Goblin-slaying's never been so good

## The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns *ZONE*'s head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

## AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DISCS

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

## The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable XWorks X6a-64.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	128MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	1GB
Video	32MB	128MB	256MB	512MB	512MB

## ALSO REVIEWED

- 68 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
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- 74 THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II
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- Buy this little lot

PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at [yoursnout@pczone.co.uk](mailto:yoursnout@pczone.co.uk)





MY lovely stolen horse. I want to shower it with sugar lumps.



A portal to the fiery planes of Oblivion, yesterday.

THIS is why I like arrows.

# THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

*Will Porter* takes on a fantasy identity that's infinitely more exciting than his own. Surprise, surprise...

DEVELOPER Bethesda  
PUBLISHER Bethesda/  
2K Games  
WEBSITE  
www.elderscrolls.com  
ETA Out now  
PRICE £39.99



## AT A GLANCE...

A massively free-roaming roleplay game that'll devour your every waking minute. Quite frankly, we are not worthy.

### System requirements

3

### HOW IT STACKS

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION	95%
ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND	94%
WOLFENSTEIN: THE MASQUERADE OF BLOODLINES	86%

**M**AGISTERIAL. That's the word we're looking for. *Morrowind* can take the plaudits for laying the groundwork and scrubbing out the rules of location linearity in role-playing, but *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* takes that model, streamlines it, seamlessly integrates exhilarating combat, smotheres it in beautiful graphics and takes both Tamriel and the art of role-playing to an unprecedented new height. It's bloody daunting at first. Your initial three hours of freedom will contain a distinct level of confusion and blind wandering, but after this period of worry an unconscious nerve will fire off at the back of your head and everything will just click. This is where the adventure begins, and this is where you begin to melt into your PC.

So where do you want to go today? Well, there's a pretty wide choice round these here parts – so I'll fill you in on what I've been up to and we'll build from there. I began yesterday by lurking outside a jeweller's shop until approximately 2am. I then proceeded to creep upstairs and slaughter the owner of said shop with a combination of arrows and fireballs directed at his head. Having looted the shop for anything that glittered, I then crept out

and avoided the law until I reached a nearby hovel where I slept until dawn.

This morning, I scurried to the nearest stable (neatly sidestepping a woman asking me if I'd heard of the terrible tragedy in town), rustled a horse and clippety-clopped into the bright new day. This afternoon I will slink around dusty tombs in search of treasure, and to make up for my many crimes I'll give saving the world a whirl come teatime. Oh, and there's a gang of women convincing menfolk that a night of nookie is on the cards when they're actually going to mug them – I could sort that out. Oh, and I've got to kill a pirate. And I also want to make my horse climb that big mountain. I'm sorry, but if you're not partial to ecstatic hyperbole in game reviews then stop reading. Just stop reading now.

## ECSTATIC JUBILATION

Best giant rats ever? I think so! They're huge! They leap, they jump, they bite! They appear just after your opening escape from prison, what with a secret doorway leading from your cell providing not only an escape route for embattled Emperor Uriel Septim, but also an ingenious tutorial for your good self. And there you are battering rats in a gloomy Goblin cave, happily blocking with your right mouse button and slashing with



IF it looks evil it generally is.

LESSON learned: horses don't climb.



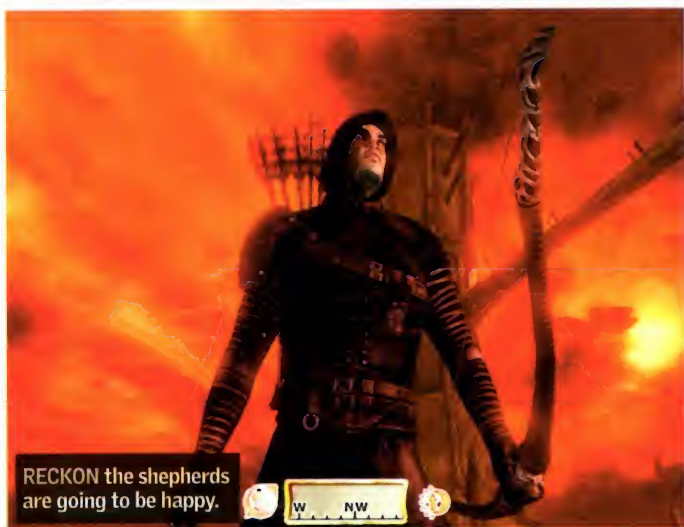
your left, fighting the most jumpy and savage role-play rats ever created. Does life get any better than this? Yes, immeasurably.

I'll leave the delights of one of the most intuitive character-creation processes of all time to your own discovery, but plot-wise, the prologue sees the untimely demise of the aforementioned Emperor (played by Patrick Stewart), whose dying wish is for you to "Make it so" by finding his long-lost son. Without a hereditary ruler you see, the land of Cyrodiil becomes an open target for ferocious demons intent on expanding their fiery domains into mortal territories – an issue somewhat glossed over by its own

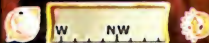


## Look who's moved in next door...

It's time for some shameless pimping of the writer's avatar



RECKON the shepherds are going to be happy.



So this is me. My name is Batsphinx, I'm a Dark Elf, and the natty ensemble I'm wearing was presented to me by a group of assassins known as the Dark Brotherhood for my services in fireballing a pensioner while he was sleeping. I was born under the sign of the Thief (although secretly I wish that I'd chosen The Lover), and I have an ancestral power that allows me to conjure up the spirit of deceased relations to protect me once a day. I'm skilled with the bow, effective with a blade and I have spent most of my life in and out of jail. I once got bitten by a vampire, but I feel a lot better. My favourite colour is green. I'm currently standing in an otherworldly plane from which evil Daedric forces plan to destroy life as I know it. To my knowledge, I've never once kissed a girl.

### LESSON learned # 2: perseverance is everything.



Princes and bubbling lava are open from early in the game, and you'll come across more than one of their fiery portals.

### HACK. SLASH. REPEAT?

Let's get this straight though – *The Elder Scrolls* hasn't been turned into some kind of hack 'n' slash bullshit. Affairs may have been streamlined but they certainly haven't been watered down: levels, statistics and attributes have been melded seamlessly with first-person action. Forget the slightly 'off' feel of combat in *Vampire – Bloodlines* or the strange sensation in *Morrowind* that you were hitting creatures with a wooden cane whose tip disappears three times out of five. *Oblivion* removes the passive tap-tap-tap of role-play combat and turns it into something genuinely gratifying. When you aim just above a bandit's head to account for gravity and fire off an arrow, it feels like your own skill (and your own skill alone) is to account for the neat kill – the rolling of dice is there, but done so far backstage that it could be taking place in a Securicor van in the carpark.

It may feel like they're not there, but at any point levels, classes,



UNFORTUNATELY, they never say "Yarr!" For shame.







allegiances, weights, NPC opinions, attributes, magicka, skills, fatigue, luck, agility and charisma are all bubbling under and waiting for tweekage. You never feel out of your depth though, perhaps because the game and story never pit you against foes that are remarkably out of your league. Which is great, because when you're confused and wearing the wrong armour, you're simply a bit crap rather than hopeless fodder for the horde.

Streamlining is the name of the game – everything works with ruthless efficiency and there's barely a second of time in which everything snarls up due to a misplaced magical sword or a spell without a hotkey being lost at the bottom of your magic bag. The game is a hugely complex one, but the complexity never makes its presence felt – you're too busy cooing at pretty lighting effects or murdering/saving noblemen.

## WARP FACTOR

A noteworthy departure from the *Morrowind* template, meanwhile, is the fact that once you've visited a location, you can warp to and fro via your handy map screen – bypassing the need for intense route planning and knowledge of public transport.

It's a welcome move if you found *Morrowind* that little bit too daunting. If

anything, it gives you a greater sense of freedom – meaning that when you're out exploring and adventuring you're doing it for the sake of it, rather than simply as a way of making a trek to a distant city that's more interesting. The exceptionally anal may moan at its introduction, but just because it's there doesn't mean they have to use it.

Let's not bypass this concept of exploring for the sheer heck of it, though – the land of Cyrodiil is littered with ancient tombs, mines, shrines and caverns that are full of chests that need looting and some staggeringly animated monsters. Forget Lara Croft and her stupid guns and slow-motion bullet-dodge dives – this is an entirely different thing. The dungeons of *Oblivion* are pure *Indiana Jones*-style tomb raiding – stuffed with ingenious physics-based traps, murky pedestals and crumbling walls. The whole game could play out beneath the earth and I wouldn't care – just wait until you set off a trap that spits metal darts out of a wall and watch them shatter an approaching skeleton into a bunch of bones and you'll be just as in love with *Oblivion* as I am.

## DAMP PATCH

Not every love affair runs smooth however: even Joanie and Chachie had wobbly

THESE guys are the Blades. They're integral to the plot, so pay attention.





## It's No Oil Painting...

One of the most remarkable quests in *Oblivion* takes place in a magic painting – the artist of which is lost somewhere deep inside. If ever you needed evidence that a game is something special, this is it...



THE artist's frantic wife has asked me to rescue her beloved, and I reckon he's somewhere in there. But how to get in? I end up clicking on it...



THIS is amazing. Look at the trees, that dappled rock and the mottled autumn colours on the floor. It's like real bloody art but in a game.



WOW! Look at the sky! Look at the brushstrokes! Look at the way the tree's waving about! My attention is completely elsewhere!



AH, someone seems to have painted a series of trolls into the picture who can kill me with three swipes of their still-wet claws. That's me dead then.

**Bethesda has gone and created a masterpiece. If I was on drugs I'd carve its name into my arm with a rusty knife**



Sianu Home-Wrecker



moments 23 minutes or so into each episode, and my relationship with *Oblivion* is no exception. There are a few things that niggle – the fiddly lock-picking mini-games, for example, or the thoroughly daft 'pie-chart of persuasion' that lets you butter up NPCs via a random clicking of a rotating circle. Both are needless, clearly developed with the Xbox 360 in mind, and can be circumvented at the expense of either auto-resolve or bribery – so why bother?

Other quibbles cover trees and buildings in the far distance getting jagged on the highest settings, the fact that horse-riding isn't quite as fun as it could be (how can that ever be right?) and the odd example of AI confusion (ultra-violent stolen horses spring to mind, not that we're obsessed with the horses) – but all this is a dribble of piss compared to the almighty torrent of goodness contained within *Oblivion*.

ANYTHING the Ancient Greeks can do...



DEMONS just can't stand ecclesiastical architecture.



MY elf is hardly a looker.



Its real triumph isn't even that it's so outstandingly good, but simply that it has managed to exist in this form at all. Look at how *Fable* was watered down from Molyneux's original vision. Look at the state of *STALKER*. Look at how *Oblivion*'s only noteworthy competitor is *Fallout 3*, that's not only aeons away but also made by the same people. These games are a bitch to make and absolutely hellish to actually finish, but Bethesda has gone and done it. It's created a masterpiece. As such, right now, the company is so important that if I was on drugs I'd carve its name into my arm with a rusty knife.

If you love gaming – if you love leaving your identity at the door and embarking on red-blooded adventure that's previously only been the domain of high literature and childhood imagination, I can give no higher recommendation. Make no mistake, this is more than the best role-playing game of our times. It's the best one we've ever seen. **PW**

## PCZONE

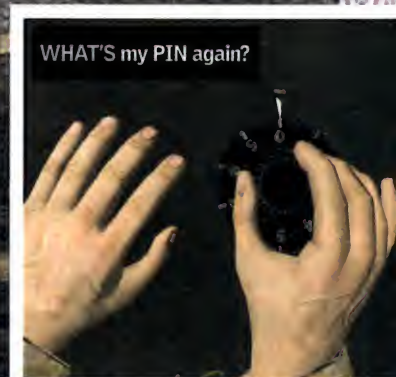
Graphics Astounding close up, pretty good from far away, with lighting to die for  
Sound Immeasurably wonderful music  
Multiplayer No, but just imagine...

- ✓ Streamlined, freeform gameplay of the gods
- ✓ Beautiful animation and lighting effects
- ✓ Ingenious quests, riveting adventuring
- ✗ Some unnecessary features

# 95

Hours upon hours of joy





# CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

Andy Robinson heads on over to the dark side...

**DEVELOPER** Headfirst  
**PUBLISHER** Ubisoft  
**WEBSITE**  
[www.callofcthulhu.com](http://www.callofcthulhu.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

**YOU DON'T SEE** these very often: it's one of those old adventure games, the type that don't feature Havoc physics or online Capture The Flag games. What's more, this is also a horror game without zombies or teleporting hell monsters – the long-awaited *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth* is a rare breed indeed.

*Dark Corners* draws from the twisted workings of literary genius HP Lovecraft, whose involving horror stories have influenced everything from *Quake* to *Alone In The Dark*. Cthulhu himself is just one of Lovecraft's many monstrous deities, but luckily for mankind is currently sleeping beneath the waves until his cult members can find a way to set him free.

*Dark Corners Of The Earth* puts you in the Italian loafers of Jack Walters, a kind

of Dick Tracey private detective who likes to smoke cigarettes and read his journal aloud. Things go a bit pear-shaped for Jack after he's called out one night to investigate a strange cult, and the next thing you know he's trying to hang himself in a rat-infested nut-house.

## A BIT BARKING

The game investigates the lost time between your mental decline and eventual recovery six years later, and *Dark Corners'* storyline is truly absorbing. The title axes the HUD interface to create a more immersive game experience, and the game's dark environments – while fairly bland and uninteresting – help give the game a tense and moody tone. Jack's flailing sanity also plays a role in events, with particularly gruesome scenes affecting his vision and slowly turning him into a complete mentalist.

*Dark Corners* is at its best when you can immerse yourself in the story and get to work solving the biting mysteries on offer. Unfortunately, by the end of the game everything succumbs to a bit of FPS butchery, putting you in shotgun shoot-outs rather than mysterious crime scenes. While we usually don't mind a bit of gun-

based action, we were so caught up in the adventuring that a descent into *Quake*-like blasting was disappointing. For the most part though, *Dark Corners* is a gripping adventure and a must-buy if you're an unashamed horror buff. **EW**

## AT A GLANCE...

Long awaited first-person horror adventure based on the literary workings of acclaimed horror author HP Lovecraft.

### System requirements

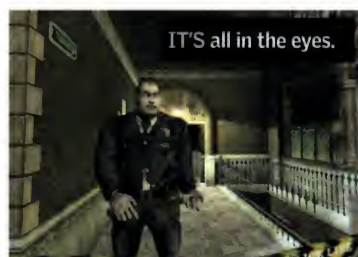
2

### HOW IT STACKS

FAHRENHEIT 90%

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 89%

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH 73%



## PCZONE

Graphics Empty, uninteresting worlds  
 Sound A tense soundtrack and surprisingly good voice-acting  
 Multiplayer Nil point

- ✓ Excellent, gripping storyline
- ✓ Absorbing worlds and characters
- ✓ Mostly good voice-acting
- ✗ Degenerates into FPS hell
- ✗ Rough graphics

# 73

Disturbingly good



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A fire-breathing dragon is just one of many new enemies on show.



# THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

*Martin Korda* readies his finger for the ring of power

**DEVELOPER**  
EA LA  
**PUBLISHER** EA  
**WEBSITE**  
bfme2.ea.com  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99

**H**OW DID IT all go so wrong? Just 15 months ago we were extolling the virtues of *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth*, one of the most entertaining and accessible RTS games we'd seen for years, a strategy game that tried something a little different and succeeded admirably in almost every department.

A sequel was of course, inevitable, welcomed, highly anticipated, an opportunity to take this bold new RTS franchise to even greater heights. Tragically though, that hasn't happened, as *TBFME2* not only lacks the original's charm, but also fails to live up to its potential on virtually every level.

Before its release, we were promised that *TBFME2* would have two big selling points: the unification of the book and movie rights under one banner (both of which are utterly under-used), and the ability to build your base anywhere on the map, a feature that manages to strip this follow-up of its predecessor's uniqueness. Not the best of starts, then. Still, it's early days yet.

## ELVES AND DWARVES

The two story-driven campaigns (good and evil) take place in the north of Middle-earth, where dwarves and elves battle the forces of Sauron. Aided by heroes – most of which you won't recognise – you lead your forces through eight piss-easy missions that feel so scripted they make WWE seem spontaneous.

Here's the thing. The beauty of the original was its freeform nature and strategic depth, two attributes that this follow-up is utterly bereft of. More often than not, missions lead you by the hand from point A to point B, where you have a scrap with some enemies, before moving you on to point C for a slightly bigger ruck. And that's about the size of it.

Sure, there are some tactical subtleties to employ, such as flanking and height bonuses, but with battles often proving to be utterly one-sided affairs (in your favour), most missions just end up feeling like strolls

across a map with a few fights thrown in for good measure.

So how about the new enemies – of which there are plenty – surely these guys should spice things up a bit? Well, not really. As visually impressive as they are – in particular Sauron's new servants which include spiders and dragons – they're all still pretty easy to beat and often display the tactical awareness of an under five's football team. And don't even get me started on the naval battles. There isn't a word in Elvish, Entish or the tongue of man that could do justice to how just bad they are.

## AT A GLANCE...

A disappointing, dumbed-down sequel to the brilliant *The Battle For Middle-Earth*, which utilises the book and film licenses and charts the struggles of the dwarves and elves against the forces of Sauron in the north of Middle-earth.

### System requirements

1

### HOW IT STACKS

THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH 91%

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR 86%

THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II 71%



CREATE your very own pug-ugly hero.



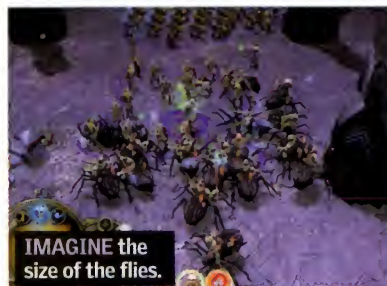


NAVAL battles are atrocious.

**They have the tactical awareness of an under-five's football team**



THIS shouldn't take long.



IMAGINE the size of the flies.



SIEGE missions are among the best in the game.



WHERE'S Wally?



MOST fortresses have multiple layers of defences.

In *The Battle For Middle-Earth II*'s defence, there's still plenty to enjoy despite the shortfalls. The game sparkles with EA's usual veneer, with some impressive visuals and truly gargantuan battles adding real beauty and bite to the proceedings. The story – what there is of it – is fairly entertaining, while heroes have an excellent array of visually spectacular skills that can be used to turn the tide of battle.

## THERE'S STILL HOPE

What's more, you can also harness the power of the One Ring or the Evenstar (depending on your allegiances), with a multitude of defensive and offensive spells available to you, including meteor showers that turn enemy units into paste and humorous yet deadly appearances from Tom Bombadil.

Perhaps *The Battle For Middle-Earth II*'s biggest problem is that it feels rushed. The

two story-driven campaigns seem hollow and overly scripted, and at around five hours each, are far too short. Battles seldom feel like desperate struggles or brutal skirmishes and rarely require much strategy. You also can't help but feel that the game's been somewhat dumbed down, as though attempting to appeal to a mass-market audience with its sheer simplicity.

What's more, the dual licences feel utterly under-used, the voice-acting is a shadow of the original's and the build-anywhere feature just makes the game feel like a myriad of other mildly entertaining yet eminently forgettable RTS games that have come and gone over the last few years.

*The Battle For Middle-Earth II* may look impressive, and its basic, by-the-numbers RTS approach is fun in a mindless sort of way. However, in no way is it anywhere near the game we hoped for. What a waste. **EW**



RAISE your arms in the air, five, six, seven, eight...

## YOUR TURN

Everyone else is doing it, maybe we should too



THE turn-based map isn't a looker.

With *Rome: Total War* and *Star Wars: Empire At War* proving just how effective a marriage between turn-based campaign and real-time battles can be, EA LA obviously thought it'd better try its hand at doing something similar.

So, it set about dividing Middle-earth into some 40 provinces, and you must conquer them all (or just a specific few if you're pushed for time) and become the supreme ruler of Middle-earth. Sounds great in principle, but once you start playing, you quickly realise just how unwieldy and ugly the campaign map actually is.

In fact, it's so clumsy that it feels more like an afterthought than a well-planned feature. Quite frankly, EA LA shouldn't have bothered.

## PCZONE

Graphics Lusciously detailed  
Sound Rousing musical score, average voice-acting  
Multiplayer 2-8 player skirmish; 2-6 player turn-based campaign

- ✓ Visually impressive
- ✓ Huge battles
- ✓ Excellent hero/Ring/Evenstar abilities & spells
- ✗ Strategically dumbed down
- ✗ Poor use of licences
- ✗ Lacks depth

# 71

Beautiful but hollow





# CRASHDAY

Steve Hill gets in some ill-advised practice for his driving test

**DEVELOPER** Moon Byte Studios/  
Replay Studios  
**PUBLISHER** Atari  
**WEBSITE**  
www.crashday.com  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

**WHAT WERE YOU** doing in 1997? Britpop was still simmering, Michael Owen had yet to score that goal, and PC gaming was heralding a brave new dawn of accelerated graphics. Meanwhile, in Germany, the developer of *Crashday* was putting together some initial concepts for the game. Had the company managed to get it out of the door in the last millennium, it

might have got away with it. As it is, it's blighted with such late 1990s traits as the much-maligned lens flare, the then ubiquitous kaleidoscopic graphical effect. And to complete the late '90s vibe, *Crashday* claims to be a latter day version of the seminal *Carmageddon*. We might as well all party like it's 1999.

Except it's £29.99, and as such is in the realms of full-price software. Despite the astonishingly lengthy development time, it never really feels that way, not least due to the erratic translation, arbitrary spelling, and sexist humour – not to mention the half-baked narrative that attempts to justify the action.

## BURNING CAR

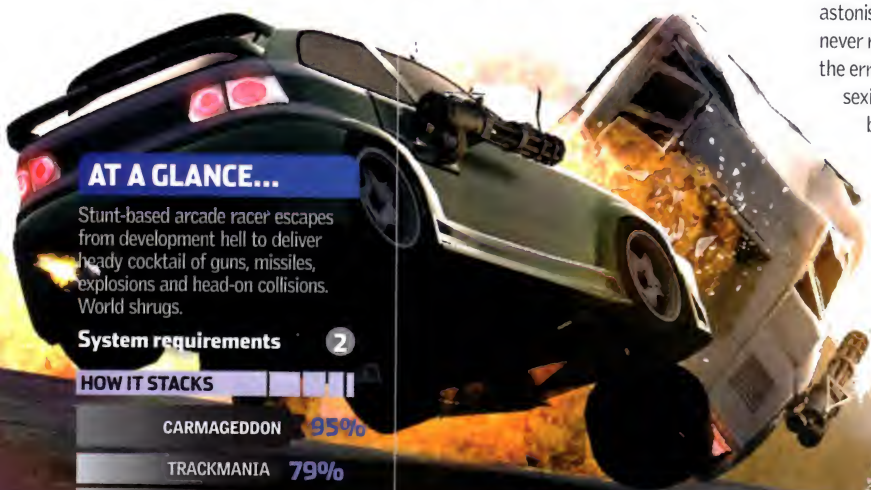
There's no need for it. *Crashday* is simply a collection of mainly unrealistic driving events, most

of which involve cars being explosively destroyed. But despite the *Carmageddon* claims, *Crashday* is an entirely sanitised affair where dying horrifically in a ball of fire simply involves an inconvenience of a few seconds.

Some tried and tested concepts are in place, from straightforward checkpoint races to knockout races, both of which can usually be negotiated through little more than judicious use of nitro and handbrake. There's also the perennial lift from the film *Speed*, with a bomb strapped to your roof and a track to negotiate without dropping below a certain velocity. Of more interest is the team-based Capture The Flag game, which while still highly entertaining on your own, does hint at the game's multiplayer leanings.

As indeed does the ability to shoot other drivers. The concept of guns on cars rarely works, and this is largely the case here, proving a (literally) hit-and-miss affair. Turning a car to fire a weapon is a lot more unwieldy than turning a person, although if you catch someone full in the radiator with a missile it can be mildly satisfying.

As for the stunt sections that the game prides itself on, they're little more than *Tony Hawk's* in a car. Spectacular though the



## AT A GLANCE...

Stunt-based arcade racer escapes from development hell to deliver heady cocktail of guns, missiles, explosions and head-on collisions. World shrugs.

## System requirements

2

## HOW IT STACKS

CARMAGEDDON 95%

TRACKMANIA 79%

CRASHDAY 65%



## We call it acieeed!

Capture the smiley face



*Crashday* may have been in development for a while, but it doesn't quite stretch back to the acid house era of smiley faces. However, the Capture The Flag variant requires your team of four cars to transport said yellow disc through a series of checkpoints. The opposition can steal it by crashing into you, and so on. A manic business, in multiplayer you can actually employ some tactics as you attempt to protect the driver who's carrying the face. Or you could just neck a pill and dance like a gibbon.

action is, while landing a 360-degree turn on a plank is challenging enough, attempting to do the same in a fast-moving car is vaguely equivalent to pissing into the wind.

### MACHINE-GUN STYLE

All of the above are linked together through a spurious career mode, which enables you to customise your cars with the obligatory performance and cosmetic upgrades. The key difference from the likes of *Need For Speed* is that for a few thousand dollars you can strap an automatic machine gun on the front of your car.

Considering there's nine years' worth of work here, there's relatively little in terms of content, and you'll tear through the career

mode in a couple of sessions. In fact, we'd be surprised if there was as much as one hour's gameplay for every year of development. While it lasts, however, it's mainly competent, even occasionally exhilarating, with further value added if you can take advantage of the multiplayer aspect. But when the development team say in the credits, it's been a "long and stressful time", you really feel what they're saying. **PC**

## PCZONE

Graphics Bland and dated  
Sound Appalling rock, passable electronic music, weak engine noises

Multiplayer Promises to be a laugh

- ✓ Well balanced
- ✓ Variety of events
- ✓ In-built grabber
- ✗ Limited
- ✗ Short
- ✗ No joypad support

# 65

Might last a day



## FORD STREET RACING

### A driving fiesta

DEVELOPER Razorworks

PUBLISHER Xplosiv

WEBSITE [www.fordstreetracing.com](http://www.fordstreetracing.com)

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

### System requirements 3

**W**HEN YOU'RE looking for a big licence for a driving game, the home of the Model T, Escort, Capri and Fiesta doesn't readily spring to mind. The latter triumvirate appear here, in what is improbably the fourth outing for the series, the key difference being the addition of the word 'street'. Those streets are based exclusively in the city of Los Angeles, are impeccably clean and entirely bereft of other traffic or pedestrians.

A bog-standard street racer on the surface, what separates this from the mire is the team racing aspect, whereby up to three of your cars compete for the spoils. No big deal, except that you can magically switch control of the respective cars mid-race. So if one is slacking towards the back of the field, jump behind the wheel and get him back into the running.

Equally cunning is the fact that you can give instructions to other drivers. Tell one to block a rival car, and if he pulls it off you'll be able to take advantage in the car that you're driving. You can also order the car in front to



draft, whereby you take advantage of his slipstream to overtake, after which he does the same to you, as if you're joined by a massive invisible elastic band. This gimmick aside, the handling is fairly woolly and there's no real sense of speed, but there's probably 20 quid's worth of fun.

Steve Hill

## PCZONE

# 62

Affordable Ford



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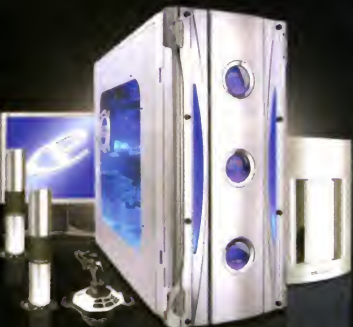
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# THE GODFATHER

In response to watching his father get shot, *Jon Blyth* does a load of missions

DEVELOPER EA Redwood Shores  
PUBLISHER EA  
WEBSITE [www.ea.com](http://www.ea.com)  
ETA Out now  
PRICE £29.99

## AT A GLANCE...

A story about revenge, power and slapping bartenders hard in the face.

### System requirements

3

### HOW IT STACKS

MAFIA 92%

THE SIMPSONS: HIT AND RUN 71%

THE GODFATHER 57%

**T**HE MAFIA, EH? When they're not extorting money from local businesses, they're taking mistresses and killing each other in front of the kids. It's a romantic world, the most famous and well-respected film of which – after *Mickey Blue Eyes* of course – is *The Godfather*. You know the film even if you haven't seen it. Mention Francis Ford Coppola to a newborn infant, and he or she will say: "The one with the horse's head and the silent scream in the third film, right?"

Making a game of a film with such awesome stature could be seen as needless. This isn't *Star Wars* – there's no pod racing and *Cantina Dance Dance Revolution* included for the benefit of the games industry. Yet EA has taken it upon itself to bend the *GTA* formula to the plot of the film, add protection rackets and release *The Godfather: The Game*.

If you love the film, you'll feel an immediate sense of relief when you start

the game – the facial detail is excellent. The cut-scenes are well-acted and lip-synched, as you've every right to expect with the late Brando on-board.

## DUMB FLAILING

But as you go through the training missions, this relief will become muddled with a mild sense of discomfort. The hand-to-hand combat system is plainly designed for the analogue sticks of a console controller. Pull back to raise your fist, push forward to punch. Sounds intuitive.



But translate that motion to a mouse, make it wildly unresponsive, and you'll need a square metre of desk space just to accommodate your own dumb flailing. The keyboard alternatives amount to a mute 'sorry about the mouse thing', and it's a real shame, because what could have been a natural way to chuck people around their own shop has been coated in treacherous faff and fed to a fat clumsy idiot.

## KNEES UP

Extortion gives you a regular income to back up your mission earnings, and to get businesses under your wing, you have to 'negotiate' with the owner. Raise your fist, smash up the shop, kneecap a customer, it all serves to up your earnings (provided you don't go too far). It gives a good sense of progress, seeing the mini-map change as your empire grows. But as the only distinguishing feature between this and superior titles, it's just not enough.



## Six dusty baps please

And don't think I'll be paying...



Being a baker in the late 1940s wasn't easy. Yeast was scarce and flour had been replaced by its cheaper sister, sand. Also, bread was illegal. The reason people flocked to the profession was the hats, the arousing mushroom shape attracting dozens of potential mates and providing the perfect hiding place for a single bowling skittle. This explains why bakers hang around in groups of ten (unless it's your second go).



My involvement in the game was constantly broken by stupid oversights. I spent the last of my money bribing an officer, yet somehow had the cash Luca needed to complete the mission. I drove over a member of the Corleone family, and he responded with a cheerful "watch out for this guy - he's going places". And my personal beef - vocal NPCs. Give them a wider range or shut them up. In five minutes of play, I heard, "Have you ever been to Topeka?" nearly 300 times. Maybe four.

I know they're not real people, I really do, it's just the sign of a great game when these possibilities are taken into account. This is based on a 34-year-old masterpiece, so it has a positive duty to be great, or not use the name. And it's not. It's not great at all.

I wanted so badly to be enjoying myself, with all the effort that had gone into the characters and likenesses, but I wasn't allowed to. And now I am cross. **PCZ**



**Raise your fist, smash up a shop, kneecap a customer, it all ups your earnings**

## PCZONE

Graphics Good characterisation, nice enough locations  
Sound Good, atmospheric music, repetitive NPC babble  
Multiplayer No

- ✓ Classic storyline
- ✓ Full facial excellence
- ✗ Designed for consoles
- ✗ Makes you look daft
- ✗ No, I haven't bloody been to Topeka
- ✗ Sad waste of the licence

# 57

Disrespectin' da family way



## ONIMUSHA 3

East meets West

DEVELOPER Capcom

PUBLISHER Ubisoft

WEBSITE [www.onimusha3.co.uk](http://www.onimusha3.co.uk)

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

**I**F YOU KNOW anything about the console world, you'll be aware of the *Onimusha* brand. A cornerstone of PS2 gaming, the series centres around samurai characters hacking and slashing their way through a host of demons in feudal Japan.

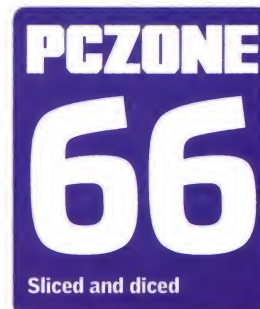
This time though, the game features two main characters - Samanosuke and Jacques Blanc (played by Jean Reno) - and after an early inter-dimensional mix-up, alternates between the Frenchman in the ninja-laden lushness of Japan and the samurai in modern-day Paris. Combining forces, they work together to hack their way through the demon forces of pesky warlord, demon and all-round bad chap Oda Nobunaga.

The result is some hugely enjoyable (if a tad simplistic) gameplay, plenty of trademark Capcom puzzle-solving (including some great 'across time'

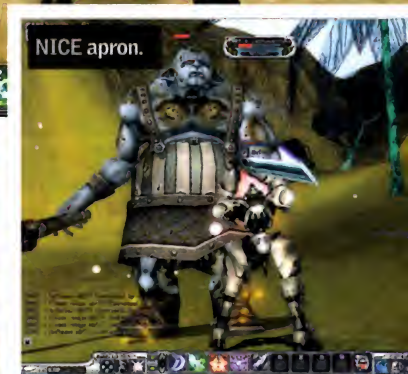
puzzles), masses of demon-slaying action, decent characterisation, a compelling storyline and perhaps one of the best intro movies ever made.

Unfortunately, the conversion to PC is a sloppy affair, leaving it with a number of issues, such as a frame-rate that's at times slower than a bed-ridden sloth, a bizarre lack of sound effects, an option to change resolution that doesn't work and the fact that the game defaults to running in a small window. Couple these with the obligatory low-res console textures and the fact that unless you've grown four extra fingers, a pad is essential, and it's soon clear that while *Onimusha 3* is still a great game, this half-arsed PC conversion doesn't quite cut it.

Suzy Wallace







DEVELOPER CCR  
PUBLISHER Codemasters  
WEBSITE  
www.rf-onlinegame.com  
ETA Out now  
PRICE £29.99

# RF ONLINE

Suzy Wallace puts her robotic nose to the grindstone

**T**HE WORLD OF MMOs is currently about as packed as one of Bob Marley's joints, so any new titles will have to bring something different to the table to be noticed. On paper, *RF Online* looks like just the candidate; a futuristic fantasy setting plays host to three competing races, thus providing scope for plenty of PvP action. There's also a pretty graphics engine with a heavy anime influence, a mass of well-animated enemies and an economy that's directly affected by the players.

The three races are a great mix: the cyborg Accretia look like they've been lifted straight from Japanese anime; the Bellato are an advanced but miniscule race with a penchant for technology (*Phantasy Star Online* anybody?); and the

Cora, with their magic and summoning abilities, have more than a hint of *Final Fantasy* about them.

## GRINDING YOU DOWN

However, once you've hooked up that broadband, it quickly becomes apparent that things aren't quite so great in reality. The first thing you notice is that *RF Online* is an unashamed grind-fest. Not only do the quests consist almost solely of 'kill 20 of these', 'kill 20 of those', but there's virtually nothing else to do should you wish to take a breather. Apart from mining. So, nothing then.

There're also a range of other issues, such as a poor draw distance, a woefully inadequate chat window, lots of translation mistakes, quest buttons that don't work and a general inability to find any kind of useful information in-game, all of which means that the first 20 or so levels leave you feeling cold.

*RF Online* does pick up at a higher level, when you can start contributing to the chip wars (essentially a massive slice of PvP action where all three races battle for control of the mines) that occur every eight hours. These are far superior to any personal PvP battles, which more than often than not become

a war, not of wits, but of who's stacked out of eight is poor going, so *RF Online* is best played only if you enjoy continual grind with minimal reward. Most of us get enough of that at work. **PCZ**

Unfortunately, an hour's excitement out of eight is poor going, so *RF Online* is best played only if you enjoy continual grind with minimal reward. Most of us get enough of that at work. **PCZ**



## AT A GLANCE...

Korean MMO that features interesting races and large-scale PvP battles, but is ultimately let down by incessant level grinding.

## System requirements

### HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%  
RF ONLINE 64%  
LINEAGE II 61%



## PCZONE

Graphics Pretty and anime-style but no *Guild Wars*  
Sound Flowing melodies and decent sound effects  
Multiplayer That's the idea

- ✓ Large-scale PvP action
- ✓ Good economy system
- ✓ Interesting combination of races
- ✗ Major grind-fest
- ✗ Unimaginative quests
- ✗ Lots of little niggles

# 64

Grind online



DO YOU HAVE  
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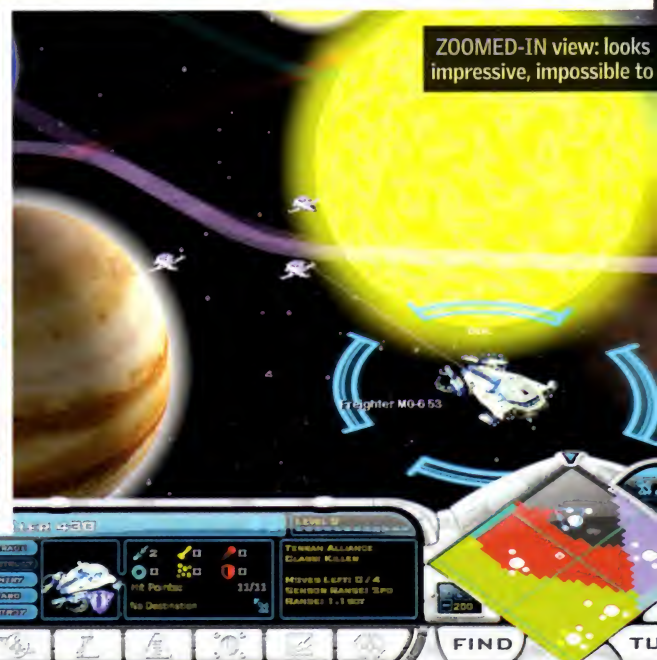
"It's not just a game, it's an experience"

9/10 Official Xbox Magazine



WWW.FULLSPECTRUMWARRIOR.COM





# GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II: DREAD LORDS

Reach for the stars, but don't put your back out says *Steve O'Hagan...*

**DEVELOPER** Stardock Software  
**PUBLISHER** Paradox Interactive  
**WEBSITE** [www.galciv2.com](http://www.galciv2.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

## AT A GLANCE...

Jostle for galactic supremacy in a turn-based empire-building sequel that feels a little like an alien relic from an earlier age.

## System requirements

2

## HOW IT STACKS

CIVILIZATION IV 92%

MASTER OF ORION 72%

GAL CIV II: DREAD LORDS 60%

**I**T'S A WELL known fact that PC gamers love conquering outer space. You come home from the tragic monotony of work or study, and through the portal of that otherwise soul-sapping monitor, you transport yourself to the furthest reaches of the galaxy and the farthest futures of mankind. Obscure the fact your bedroom is a pigsty and you've surrendered the kitchen to the cockroaches with the distractions of terraforming class IV ice worlds. So welcome back *Galactic Civilizations*, take us away once more and transcend this mortal coil again by means of your turn-based space empire building.

Turn one, and your chosen species stands ready with a home world, a humble scout ship and a colony ship crammed full of interstellar asylum seekers. From here it's up

to you to colonise new planets, mine resources and deal with your extraterrestrial competitors for universal domination as you see fit: shake their clammy reptilian hands in friendship, or ram a mass driver up their silky wormholes.

## A DARK MATTER

*Galactic Civilization's* game mechanics are straightforward, to the point of being second nature to any seasoned empire-builder. Building a military, researching technologies, expanding your colonies, trading with other civilisations: it's classic stuff, Sid Meier's *Civilization* in space. In fact, you can draw a line between many aspects of *GCII* and Sid M's *Civ*, from the diplomacy screens, to the Special Projects (they'll be World Wonders) to the option of a cultural victory.

But these tried-and-tested mechanics are not served well by a poor interface. The

tech tree is still sprawling and often incomprehensible ('What exactly is ploughing resources into Mini Balls II going to give me?'), unit stack management remains atrocious ('FOR GOD'S SAKE LET ME SELECT THE SPACE STATION!') and finding which units haven't moved this turn is a repetitive trawl. As *Civ IV* recently showed so clearly, a rejuvenated, intuitive interface can breathe new life into an old concept. Here, you want to be engrossed, you try to be engrossed, but you're prevented by sheer clunkiness.

## CRABBY NEBULA

The major renovation is *GCII's* 3D engine. Which is slightly misleading, actually, as the star map is still as flat as a pancake. From a certain angle, the jumbled clutter of multi-coloured circles and beetling ships that is *GCII's* playing space appears as if an old



## Take your pick

It may be dated, but the choices are nigh-on endless



DOESN'T look like the final frontier to us.



One thing *Dread Lords* has in spades is game set-up options. Aside from your typical options such as number of opponents and size of map, there are many scenarios to choose from. *Dread Lords on Parade* unleashes the titular terrors on the universe, with you trying to unite the various races against them; while *Battle of the Gods* starts all races with all technologies, inviting one universe-wide slugfest. There's also the *Dark Lords* campaign, a mission-based progression of games that gives you goals beyond booting the hell out of everyone else.

new features are interface tweaks that should have been addressed in a patch to the original rather than here in a sequel: grouping ships into fleets, having planets displayed on the star map, designing your own craft. A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, this kind of last-generation gameplay would relieve the daily tedium. Now it's in danger of adding to it.

### PCZONE

Graphics Improved, though not exactly stellar  
Sound Decent music, dull bleeps  
Multiplayer No

- ✓ Great campaign options
- ✓ Smooth game mechanics
- ✗ Derivative gameplay
- ✗ Interface still needs work
- ✗ Combat a spectator sport
- ✗ Counter-intuitive map



## MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

Can you think of a worse game name?

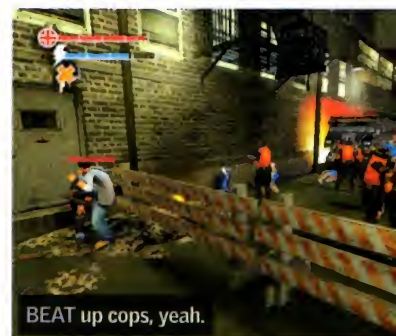
**DEVELOPER** The Collective  
**PUBLISHER** Atari  
**WEBSITE** www.collectivestudios.com  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

**System requirements** 4

**WHO IS MARC** Ecco, and why are his contents under pressure when he gets up? Is this some bizarre game about relieving some Finnish guy's morning wood? No, turns out our Marc is a famous New York urban fashion designer-cum-entrepreneur, and this is his first foray into videogame sponsorship. First award: **worst game title of the year so far.**

Set in a near-future, oppressive New York, *Getting Up* plays you as a humble ghetto graf artist. You've got to increase your rep (man) by scrawling designs in conspicuous places while avoiding the fascistic riot police and kicking the hell out of rival turf gangs.

Already banned in Australia for glorifying vandalism, it's an odd mix of martial arts, platforming and GTA-style street roaming, and as something a little different is commendable. The whole thing is slicker than a leaking super tanker, with flashy cut-scenes and



a top-drawer hip-hop soundtrack featuring Mobb Deep, Talib Kweli and Pharoahe Monch.

However, seeing as the whole point is painting on walls, it's sad you don't get to draw your own designs – although New York covered with crude cocks and balls is not quite as dope as flashy street tags. Even worse, it's designed for console, so the mouse and keyboard controls are horrendous and the disparate gameplay elements don't add up to a whole hill of black-eyed beans. Or peas. So what about a game about relieving morning wood?

Steve O'Hagan







# CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006

A title contender or relegation fodder? *Martin Korda* pitches in

**DEVELOPER**  
Beautiful Game Studios  
**PUBLISHER** Eidos  
**WEBSITE**  
www.championshipmanager.co.uk  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99



**D**ON'T YOU JUST love it when a game pleasantly surprises you? Seeing as it was only a year ago that the once great *Championship Manager* franchise was floundering on the brink of administration (thanks to the abysmal *CM5*), it's impressive to see just how much it's improved in such a short space of time.

Before we begin, let's clear one thing up. This isn't *Football Manager*, a game that's a far more detailed and accurate representation of the real world of football management than this. However, *Championship Manager 2006* is still a decent sim, one that approaches the world of management in a slightly less hardcore fashion than its illustrious rival, yet still proves entertaining and stimulating in its own right.

## BATTLING

*CM2006* only has around half the leagues of *FM2006*, but the ones that are there are fairly accurate. Player stats are mostly solid, while results (save for the odd

ludicrous one) generally reflect the real world. An option to inject more funds into your team is an excellent addition, allowing you far more freedom in the transfer market than in *FM2006*.

The new match engine is also a success, with players making intelligent runs, keepers fumbling stinging shots and tricky wingers bamboozling defenders. It's often a pleasure to watch matches, despite the ball ping around with a little too much gusto at times. Strategically, there's also been a leap forward, though your tactical changes during a game don't always seem to make all that much difference. Overall, the game looks and feels about 70 per cent realistic.

There are plenty of nice touches on display, including performance reports (for players you've shown an interest in), player politics and pre-match articles that introduce your forthcoming games. What's more, the debilitating crashes of *CM5* now seem to be a thing of the past.

However, the game is still far from perfect. The interface is the major

problem, proving horribly unwieldy and confusing, while there are still plenty of glitches on show. The tactics board is also a bit of a mess and doesn't always correspond to your team selection.

Ultimately though, *Champ Man 2006* is still a massive improvement over its predecessor, providing an enjoyable if occasionally frustrating management experience. If the series carries on improving at this rate, maybe next year we'll see it back in the big time. **PCZ**

## PCZONE

Graphics Spreadsheets and a decent match engine  
Sound A little too much like *Sensible Soccer*  
Multiplayer None

- ✓ Fun new match engine
- ✓ Leagues are detailed
- ✓ Excellent transfer options
- ✗ Clunky, unwieldy interface
- ✗ Still a few irritating bugs
- ✗ Nowhere near as detailed as *Football Manager*

**69**  
Mid-table Championship rather than Premiership

## AT A GLANCE...

The latest iteration of this footy management series is less hardcore and manages to eradicate many of the shortfalls of its predecessor.

### System requirements

### HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006 **90%**  
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006 **69%**  
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 **50%**







## VIRTUAL SKIPPER 4

Regatta have it

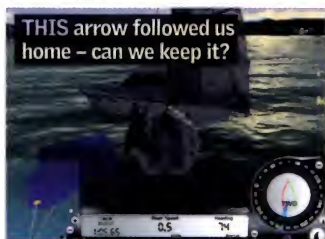
**DEVELOPER** Nadeo  
**PUBLISHER** Focus Interactive  
**WEBSITE** www.virtualskipper.com  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99  
**System requirements** 2

**S**AILING IS ONE of those things – like top hats and laser surgery – that you can happily go through life being ignorant about. It largely stays out of our way (boats are confusing and crap on land), and the vague romance of a seafaring life is more than outweighed by the fact that it looks a bit much like effort.

*Virtual Skipper 4* brings this world of anchors and wet shoes directly to you, a world where the only respite from the sound of rosy wind-whipped foreheads is the gentle vibraphone music that accompanies the menus.

Pitched squarely at boat-lovers, previous *Skippers* haven't been terribly welcoming to the novice. This lack of instruction or intuition rapidly led, in the less patient, to a fierce desire to burn all boats and everyone in them.

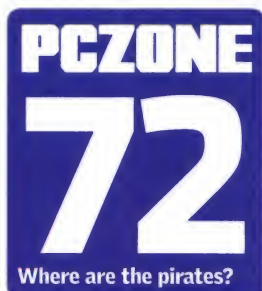
In contrast, *Virtual Skipper 4* introduces a tutorial and arcade mode, explaining to open-faced soil-cuddlers why just pressing up



won't make you go dead fast. You're introduced to tacking, sails and the Regatta, and you're left with enough knowledge to get on a real-life boat and shout "starboard please" with petulant authority.

So, *VS4* is a game for people who love sailing. Pull me from my chair and sit on my neck for saying anything so obvious. If you love sailing, then you'll love this excellent sailing simulator. If you don't, then be prepared for some soul-searching as you wonder why the hell you're playing this excellent sailing simulator.

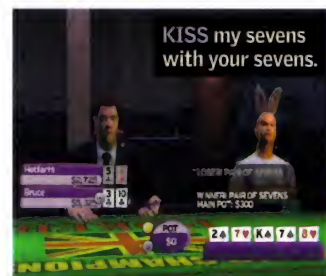
Jon Blyth



## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2

Lose everything ten times a day

**DEVELOPER** Crave Entertainment  
**PUBLISHER** Oxygen  
**WEBSITE** www.cravegames.com  
**ETA** April 28  
**PRICE** £29.99  
**System requirements** 1



**G**AMBLING IS THE closest I get to religion – betting on the roll of the dice is like saying, 'Come, Lady Luck, and do be sure to bring it, for I will thrash you in the craps'. Poker, though, has always terrified me. I'm not scared of maths, probability and luck; I'm scared of aggressive fat men beating my pair and then not giving me my money back when I start crying – it's so unfair. Roulette may not reward expert play, but it doesn't glare at you with contempt, either.

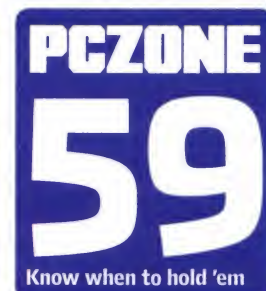
*World Championship Poker 2* reproduces this smoky world of indecision and gloating, and thankfully, Crave seems keen to make you a better poker player. At earlier stages, abnormal play is flagged and punished with a mini-game that

makes you squeal in uncontrollable delight if you fail. As your experience grows though, you can level up your stats, making the game easier as the competition heats up.

So, screaming chuckle-bluffs may be unavoidable at the start, but level up your poker face, and you'll soon be giving nothing away. This makes up for the limited dress-up-Barbie character creation and the fact that half the voices, although they get their points across, sound touched with the special needs wand.

With nothing beyond a grim gambling fascination, I quickly went from reckless overbetting calamities to profitably unsexy play. Finally, I might be ready to throw fivers at my friends and start crying.

Jon Blyth







# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH

Dan Griliopoulos kicks back, digs out the D20 and learns to roll with it...



**DEVELOPER**  
Turbine  
**PUBLISHER** Atari  
**WEBSITE**  
www.ddo-europe.com/  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99



## AT A GLANCE...

The world-leading RPG goes online, bringing plots, traps and proper role-playing to a familiar world.

### System requirements

3

### HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%

GUILD WARS 94%

D&D ONLINE: STORMREACH 84%

**O**NE OF MY earliest memories is walking in the English countryside with my family, up a titter-provoking hill called Ward's Knob. As we rounded a corner into an abandoned quarry, five curiously-attired men leapt out and started hitting each other with sticks, shouting, "Mighty blow!" and "Melf's acid arrow!" After 30 seconds, they sat down, breathing heavily and started rolling funny-shaped dice. It was weird, alienating and totally *Dungeons & Dragons*.

This heritage of knowing what people want and how people like to play geeky games with each other is key to why

*Dungeons & Dragons Online* should be one of the best MMOs around. No organisation or body of designers has such a wealth of experience and a history in getting people to play together and immerse themselves in make-believe (apart from the Lib-Dems perhaps). Factor in the experience of the people adding the *Online* to *D&D* – Turbine, creator of *Asheron's Call* – and *Stormreach* offers a wealth of potential.

## HOW SOLO CAN YOU GO?

So does it fulfil this promise? Well, there are a couple of initial problems. First, it's impossible to play by yourself, to 'solo' in

MMO parlance. The training levels let you have a go, but most of the classes just aren't self-reliant enough; as there's no automatic regeneration of health or magic, you have to work with limited resources in every mission and there aren't enough for the solo player.

Second, it can be difficult to find an acceptable team; the group-allocation system is a bit rough and ready, the meeting points (taverns) laggy as hell. Automatic grouping points, as in *World Of Warcraft*, would be a boon, especially for the shorter missions.

Beyond these somewhat irritating elements, the character-creation system reveals the wizardry of the rules underlying







## When you swing your blade, a thousand different calculations come into effect

the game. You choose from your usual selection of races (Human, Elf, Dwarf, Halfling and the slightly unusual Warforged golem), along with a wider-than-normal range of 12 archetypes, such as Barbarians and Bards. The rest of the system is instantly recognisable from any other *D&D* PC game, like *Baldur's Gate* or *Neverwinter Nights*. You can customise just about every statistic (within race restrictions), meaning you can make original character types easily.

### PICK YOUR OWN

These characteristics really matter when you get into a group and into the missions, as it's all about specialisation. Make a rogue who can't pick locks but who's excellent at backstabbing, and your group will still get through each mission, yet will miss out on those unlockable goodies. Choose a sorcerer over a wizard and you'll be able to cast the

same spell many times but have a far more limited repertoire of magic, which might be your undoing against creatures who are resistant to certain types of magic.

### CAUGHT IN A TRAP

In addition, all the missions are instanced like *Guild Wars*. Within them, the challenges aren't only monsters; often, missions are maze-like with intricate plots that drag you all over the map. There are also traps which only rogues can remove, secret doors that require spotting and optional side-quests galore.

The missions aren't only hack-and-slash exercises either; you get no XP for killing most of the enemies, only for completing missions, and some missions don't even feature other combatants. One of our favourites was a Smash n' Grab exercise, where we had five minutes to destroy all the

crates in an enormous warehouse, just running around smashing boxes willy-nilly.

Despite scrabbling for more criticisms, we can't fault the combat. Unlike the sleep-tastic automatic combat simulations seen in other games (step forward *WOW*), this is truly involved. When you swing your blade, a thousand calculations come into effect; is the enemy blocking, are they resistant to the type of weapon you're using, is there more than one of them... All of these affect what your chance of hitting is and how much damage you cause. If you want, you can turn on automatic targeting, but it's deliberately slower than clicking yourself; to ensure success, you have to get hands-on and think about what you're fighting and who you're fighting it with.

We've not had a chance to mention how good the game looks and how atmospheric the sound is, nor the curious but elegant levelling system and the variety of items. We might not have seen any dragons in there, but we saw plenty of dungeons and we'll be visiting them again, and soon. **PC4**

## Stranger Danger

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore



If you played *Dragonshard* (it was you was it?), you might recognise the world of Eberron, where *Stormreach* is set. It's a typical *D&D* world with a history of mass bloodshed and destruction (yawn), but it just doesn't have the aesthetic elegance of the various planes of the main *D&D* universe that were represented in *Baldur's Gate*, all the pen-and-paper role-playing games and the thousands of fun, shlock fantasy novels under the *D&D* brand. This means all those kooky characters you want to see again, like Minsc and Boo, Drizzt and the Undying One, aren't going to be NPCs in *Stormreach*, barring some inter-dimensional plane-crossing event. Which we have to admit is, in a fantasy universe, entirely plausible.



## PCZONE

Graphics Beauty in the eye of the beholder  
Sound Bardic brilliance, if a little folksy  
Multiplayer Nothing but

- ✓ Great for groupies
- ✓ Wonderful character creation
- ✓ Amazing mission structures
- ✓ Skill-based combat
- ✗ Impossible to solo
- ✗ Some lag and bugs

# 84

Underground hit





## UBERSOLDIER

**Nazis? Zombies? Familiarity. Contempt**

**DEVELOPER** Burut Creative Team  
**PUBLISHER** CDV  
**WEBSITE** [www.ubersoldier.net](http://www.ubersoldier.net)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99

**System requirements** 3

**T**HE PROBLEM WITH all WWII zombie games is that the scripts are too well-written and competently performed. They should get the evil characters to sound like Skeletor and give scriptwriting to a nine-year-old pumped full of Haribo. Ladies and gentlemen, I bring you *ÜberSoldier*.

To start with, you'll laugh. The plot is explained to you with all the elegance of a hard flick on the eyeball. It stops just short of a narrator walking on in a chunky jumper marked NARRATOR saying: "Soon you will be controlling this man using your mouse and keyboard. This is an FPS."

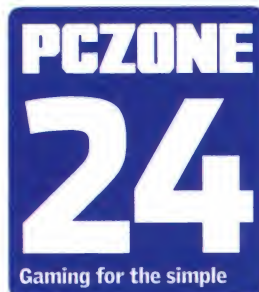
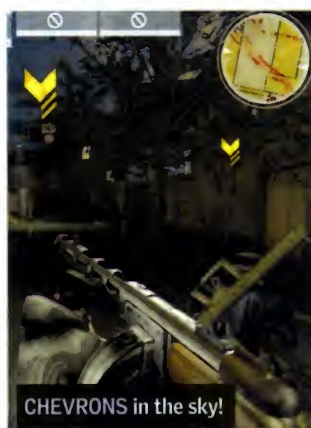
Sadly, once the script stops, the game quickly becomes a joyless chore. The only time I can honestly say I was having fun was when I stabbed an already-dead doctor. The blood-

spray animation came from his arse, you see. It's not that I'm childish – it's just that... He was doing a red trump.

Beyond that, it's almost impossible to describe in how many ways this game fails to involve and entertain. Fighting is dull, the gimmick is a blue shield bubble that just makes the game chaotically unplayable, level design is uninspired, the AI has captains loading their weapons in the middle of a room while you idly decide which nostril to shoot. What's more, do professional soldiers really scream, "I'll kill you!" as they run into your sights, or is it just the evil ones?

This could have been a classic comedy – the lost series of 'Allo 'Allo – but some idiot chose to put a crappy game in the middle.

Jon Blyth



## RUGBY CHALLENGE 2006

**If at first you don't succeed...**

**DEVELOPER** Swordfish Studios  
**PUBLISHER** Ubisoft  
**WEBSITE** [www.rugby-challenge.com](http://www.rugby-challenge.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99

**System requirements** 3

**I**'VE BEEN BIG my whole life. At school, this meant I had two choices. One, put up with wiry nippers climbing over me, saying: "You've got big bones mister, are you a brontosaurus?" Or two – join the rugby team. I chose rugby. Because they assumed I already knew the rules, what followed was a murky set of breathless, panicked hour-long sessions where I hadn't got a damn clue what I was doing.

Last issue, EA's *Rugby 2006* reflected the game's complexity (compared to, say, football) by making the gameplay equally tough. Ubisoft has gone the other way, including tutorials that range from running around – really, you just run around for ten seconds and it says well done – to more competitive training sessions that boost your players' stats in career mode. It's a gentle introduction, and unless you're startled by grunting, you'll probably win your first friendly match.

Then it all fumbles. A sense of repetition sets in – that's because there's not much you can actually do during a match. Getting possession feels like waiting for them to make a mistake, rather than your own formidable, brutish tackling skills. Tactically, kicking is as much use as spider porn. Different match styles, training and career modes all add some depth, but this depth still surrounds the same shallow gameplay.

*Rugby Challenge 2006* is fine for people who aren't sports gaming fans: it's friendly and easy to get into. But if you're a die-hard nut who needs nuance, try elsewhere.

Jon Blyth





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*"It is big, and it is clever...."*

—PC Gamer\*

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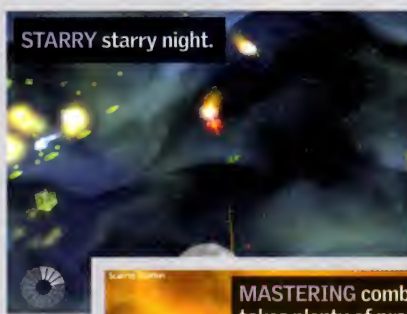


It's got nothing to do with an action-loving archaeologist, but plenty to do with independent development. *Martin Korda* rounds up this month's offerings...

# FLATSPACE II: THE RISE OF THE SCARRID

INDIEZONE  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH

DEVELOPER Cornutopia Software WEBSITE [www.lostinflatspace.com](http://www.lostinflatspace.com) PRICE £14



**IT'S ALWAYS IMPRESSIVE** when a one-man team (with a little help from a friend or two) attempts to create a truly ambitious game, and in *FlatSpace II*, solo developer Mark Sheeky has done an admirable job of combining

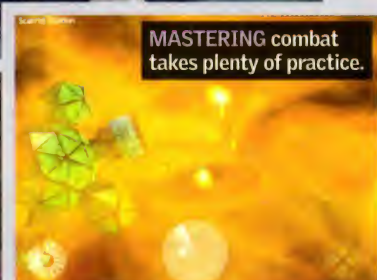
frenetic space combat with a persistent, sprawling universe.

After choosing a profession from a long list – which includes bounty hunter, assassin and police officer – you set out in your little shuttle looking to bolster your reputation, vessel and funds.

Darting around the galaxy from one space station to the next, you must trade and complete missions – many of which are profession-specific – while battling other traders in manic dogfights that take more than a modicum of skill to master.

Sadly, *FlatSpace II*'s poor visuals and a lack of a much-needed in-game tutorial mar an otherwise excellent piece of independent coding, which, for the most part, teams with endless hours of interstellar entertainment. Recommended.

**MASTERING** combat takes plenty of practice.



PCZONE  
68



## LOVECHESS

DEV Artmunk Games WEBSITE [www.lovechess.com](http://www.lovechess.com) PRICE \$24.99 (£14)

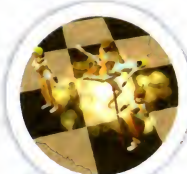
**WE'VE HAD BATTLE CHESS**, now brace yourself for *LoveChess*, a game in which pieces take each other in a whole different way.

In *LoveChess: Age Of Egypt* (to give it the name on its birth certificate), you play on a board of naked people (one side male, the other female). They bare no resemblance to the pieces they're supposed to represent, and you watch with mild embarrassment as two 3D models go at it in a variety of positions whenever a piece is taken. It's utterly gratuitous and about as erotic

as walking in on your parents mid-tryst.

What's more, identifying who's who on the board is time-consuming, despite the inclusion of an accurate chessboard representation of your game in the lower left of the screen.

Despite this, *LoveChess* does provide a half-decent game of chess, so if you're into cracking one off while cogitating about your next move, this is for you.



PCZONE  
55



# MOTORAMA

DEVELOPER IPlayAllDay Studio WEB [www.motoramagame.com](http://www.motoramagame.com) PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

**I'VE OFTEN BEEN** asked how much I think an indie game should cost. Actually that's a complete lie, but for the sake of this review, let's pretend it's true. Well, in the case of *Motorama* – a fiendishly addictive and highly challenging 2D stunt bike game – I'd say around five quid, which by my estimation, is less than half the actual asking price.

Now don't get me wrong: *Motorama* has plenty to offer, sporting almost 40 vastly different levels that task you with performing stunts, traversing obstacles

and collecting medals super-fast, a feat made all the harder by some spot-on physics that make your two-wheeled beast buck like a raging bull.

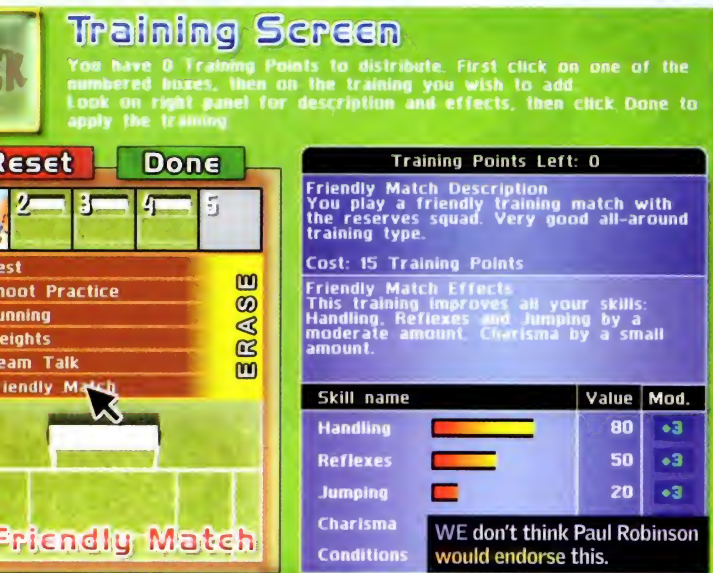
However, *Motorama's* problem doesn't lie with its gameplay, but rather in its complete lack of sheen. As a result, the game looks excruciatingly amateurish despite its charms. Add to this the over-inflated price, and you're left with a promising title that simply doesn't warrant the outlay. Pity.

PCZONE  
52



# THE GOALKEEPER

DEVELOPER Winter Wolves WEB [www.winterwolves.com](http://www.winterwolves.com) PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



**HAVE YOU EVER** noticed how you never get to play as the goalie in footy games? Well that's all about to change thanks to *The Goalkeeper*.

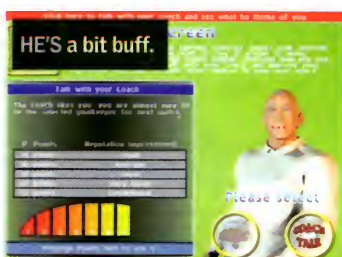
After choosing a league – the English, Spanish, French, German, Italian or German top divisions – you select your team and allocate points to four goalkeeping stats: handling, reflexes, jumping and charisma. Next, customise the look of your goalie, then it's time to start building your reputation and hopefully gain a transfer to a big-name team. How successful you are depends on how well you train, your performances and your attitude off the field towards your manager, team-mates and fans.

"But what about the matches?" I hear you roar. Well, your involvement in

games is fairly minimal – you control a pair of hands in a 2D goal and must try to get them in the way of any shots that come your way.

Frankly, it's all a bit shit and about as much fun as a slap in the face with a pair of sweaty goalie gloves.

PCZONE  
20



## Developer Q&A

MIKE JONES & PAUL HAMILTON

MIKE (FOUNDER PROGRAMMER)

PAUL (LEAD DESIGNER)

COMPANY Binary Graffiti

WEBSITE [www.binary-graffitti.com](http://www.binary-graffitti.com)

GAMES *miXem Deluxe* and multiple titles for mobile phones

**PCZ** Tell us a bit about your gaming and programming background?

**MIKE** I've been programming games for fun since the days of the ZX81 and Spectrum. In fact, one game called *Missile Defence* was a finalist in the DIV Game Studio competition judged by PC ZONE.

**PCZ** Tell us a bit about *miXem Deluxe*?

**PAUL** I wanted to make a mobile puzzle game after playing loads of *Tetris Attack* against my wife. The idea of mixing colours came to me while I was reading a magazine article. After selling well in the mobile sector, Mike had the idea of making an enhanced PC version.

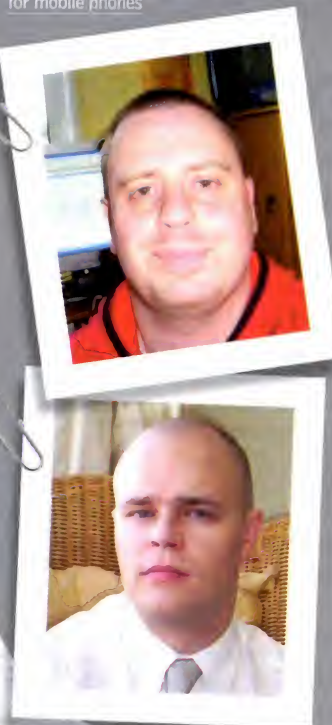
**PCZ** What advice would you give other budding indie game developers?

**MIKE** Go for it! There's nothing really to lose and plenty to gain. But please, no more 'matching three shapes or colours' games – or *Zuma* clones!

**PCZ** What's the best thing about indie gaming?

**MIKE** The sheer quantity and quality of titles available and the fact that a small team can still make a big impact on the scene.

BINARY  
GRAFFITTI





# BUDGET

Payday too far away? *Suzy Wallace* discovers a solution...

BUDGET  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH

## THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK:

### ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

PUBLISHER Bestseller series (VU Games) WEBSITE [www.riddickgame.com](http://www.riddickgame.com) PRICE £9.99

**EVERY NOW AND** then, a gem of a game comes along that's largely overlooked by the gaming community. Dwarfed upon release by such behemoths as *Half-Life 2* and *Rome: Total War*, *Escape From Butcher Bay* manages the rare task of being one of the only film-to-game conversions that far surpasses its celluloid brethren.

Featuring gravelly-voiced Vin Diesel as Riddick, this FPS is centred around his capture, stay and eventual escape from the brutal prison of Butcher Bay. As such, it's full to the brim with all manner of unsavoury characters, legally dubious activities and more violence than you'll find outside a Wetherspoons at kicking-out time. Not exactly a suitable present

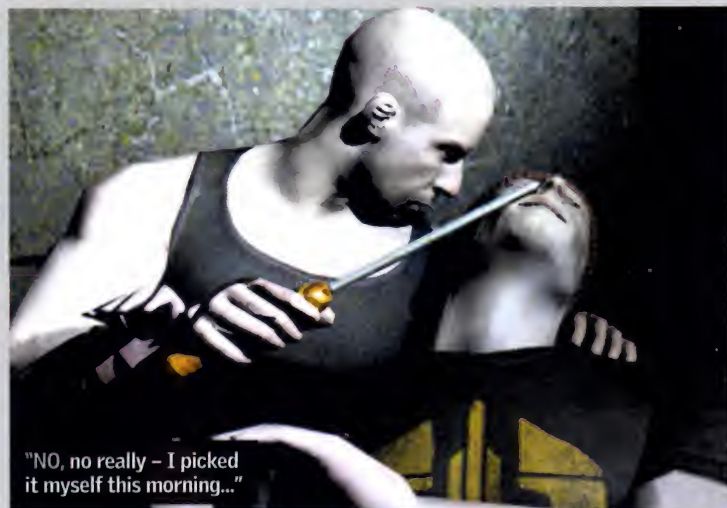
for your eight-year-old cousin then.

When you're not wielding guns, the game takes a decidedly more sneaky turn, allowing you to explore the excellent and well-realised melee combat system. Said system uses a nifty combination of WASD keys and mouse buttons which means you can unleash a swift-fisted combination on your unwitting opponents. Combine these levels of violence with the oppressive but gorgeously rendered scenery, some superb voice-acting, plenty of neat touches and great pacing throughout the game and at this price, *Riddick* is one title it'd be criminal to miss.

PCZONE  
85



SO embarrassing when you don't realise it's fancy dress.



"NO, no really - I picked it myself this morning..."

## THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Steve drinking his housemate's apple juice rather than buying his own:  
Saving: 66p



Jamie Sefton refraining from buying a round:  
Saving: £15

Will's girlfriend not buying him a card on Valentine's Day:  
Saving: £1.99



## EVIL GENIUS

PUBLISHER Bestseller series (VU Games) WEBSITE [www.howevilareyou.com](http://www.howevilareyou.com) PRICE £9.99

**ESSENTIALLY A STRATEGY** title with added 'muhahahaha' content that's best played while simultaneously stroking a white cat, *Evil Genius* takes all of your bad guy fantasies and wraps them up in one accessible package.

Taking the basic gameplay of *Dungeon Keeper*, you have to construct your evil lair and combine it with some strategic Risk-style manoeuvring, while simultaneously preventing any do-gooders from infiltrating your base and messing up your plans for world domination via the use of your evil henchmen and some

fiendish traps. Graphically, the game's always been more Austin Powers than James Bond and things can descend into micro-management mayhem, but this is mostly countered with a liberal dose of evil humour. Oh, and it has evil monkeys. What more could you want?

PCZONE  
80



SUPERGRAN strikes.



IT'S evil. And genius.



# GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

PUBLISHER Bestseller series (VU Games)  
WEBSITE [www.groundcontrol2.com](http://www.groundcontrol2.com) PRICE £9.99



NOW that's what I call cloud control.



NOW that's what I call ground control.

NOW that's what I call air control.



**THIS MAY NOT** be the hardcore Swedish action you're looking for, but it's still an excellent sci-fi RTS game with visuals that still pack a punch even two years on.

*Ground Control II* dumps that dull chopping trees/mining ore resource-management bit and instead fast-forwards to the front line, where, as the

Northern Star Alliance, you have to repel the onslaught of the alien Terran Empire. Once you've completed that campaign, it's time to take control of a green-skinned bunch of nomadic creatures called the Virons, who possess the unique ability to meld units to create mega-powerful super-units.

Essential to success is mastering battlefield tactics such as scanning terrain and occupying high ground, and units such as the handy NSA Dropship are perfect for delivering your troops to the action – although the AI, on occasion, can be dim.

However, with both objective-driven and freeform missions – the latter of which produce some of the most joyous and chaotic RTS moments ever – *Ground Control II* is worth exploring.

PCZONE  
78

# SPELLFORCE: THE ORDER OF DAWN

PUBLISHER Sold Out WEBSITE [www.sold-out.co.uk](http://www.sold-out.co.uk) PRICE £4.99

**A BIT LIKE** alcohol and pregnancy, genres don't normally mix. But nowadays, anything goes, so up steps *SpellForce*. At first glance it's a pretty standard fantasy RTS, but upon deeper perusal, you'll find all the stats that a heavily-bearded RPG fan could possibly yearn for.

Complementing the actually-quite-good mix of genres is a pretty engine, an impressive range of units and enough main and sub-missions to keep you occupied until the sequel's release.

However, the otherwise great mix is let down by a poor story and the fact that the battles require very little strategy to win, with defeat being the harder to achieve option (for once). But for this bargain-basement price, less than two pints of lager-beer, you can't complain at getting two genres for the price of one.

PCZONE  
75



THAT'S going to hurt.



HOPE the central heating's working.



OUTSIDE courtyard, all mod cons.

## And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



### HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

£4.99, Sold Out

The first *Hitman* to make playing a bald man cool: a vastly improved engine, superb dialogue and cut-scenes, plus a massive range of disguises are only let down by a clichéd plot. Even better, this slice of assassin has now halved in price.

PCZONE  
68



### CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

£4.99, Sold Out

Despite resembling an Excel spreadsheet, this version of *Champ Man*-before-it-went-bad is an absolute steal. The first in the series to feature moving graphics, the teams may be out-of-date, but this is still a striking footy management sim.

PCZONE  
84



### ASCARON COLLECTIONS: ACTION & STRATEGY

£9.99, Ascaron Entertainment

Three pirate-themed games: *Port Royale*, *Tortuga* and *Patrician III*. Unfortunately, barring *Port Royale*, they're not all that, so you're better off saving your pieces of eight for other treasure.

PCZONE  
62

## PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



### 1 FAR CRY

£9.99, Mastertronic

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



### 2 X2: THE THREAT

£9.99, White Label

Beyone *Freelancer*! The real space sim starts here. On budget anyway (X3 is better yet but costs more). Freedom among the stars. Could life be better?



### 3 BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

£9.99, Focus

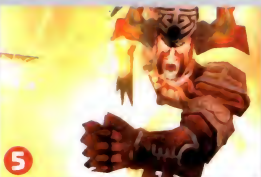
Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in all of gaming-dom make the ever-overlooked *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



### 4 SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

£12.99, Codemasters

One of the finest strategy titles of recent years, *Soldiers* is a near-perfect blend of tactical thought, balls-out action and historical accuracy.



### 5 WARHAMMER 40K: DOW

£9.99 Focus

Even if you've never heard of the Games Workshop franchise, this *Command & Conquer*-style RTS is great-looking and explosive fun.



# BUYER'S GUIDE

Nothing to spend your money on? Start here...



## PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES WITH THE WORD ELITE IN THEIR TITLE

- 1 ELITE
- 2 STAR TREK: VOYAGER - ELITE FORCE
- 3 SNIPER ELITE
- 4 PANZER ELITE
- 5 BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE



## PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES - ANDY ROBINSON

- 1 STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT - DARK FORCES II  
PCZ ISSUE: 55
- 2 HALF-LIFE 2  
PCZ ISSUE: 148
- 3 COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT  
PCZ ISSUE: 47
- 4 COUNTER-STRIKE  
PCZ ISSUE: N/A
- 5 UNREAL TOURNAMENT  
PCZ ISSUE: 81



## PCZONE TOP 5 STAR WARS GAMES

- 1 KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
- 2 DARK FORCES
- 3 TIE FIGHTER
- 4 JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH
- 5 EMPIRE AT WAR



## Shooters

### Must buy!



**HALF-LIFE 2**  
PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



**BATTLEFIELD 2**  
PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



**FAR CRY**  
PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeing action and the best sniping money can buy.



**CALL OF DUTY 2**  
PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



**UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004**  
PCZ Issue: 138 - 91%

*UT2004* packs so much punch, you'd be hard pushed to find a flaw. Team games, deathmatches, tactical thinking in the Onslaught mode - everything the sci-fi shoot 'em up fan could want.



**F.E.A.R.**  
PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge of the Nerds* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



**SWAT 4**  
PCZ Issue: 154 - 86%

*SWAT 4* is a tactical squad shooter that sings. Dark in places, brutal in others, it's the only shooter that allows you to taser old ladies and drown them in pepper spray. Probably the best co-op experience around to boot.

## Strategy

### Must buy!



**ROME: TOTAL WAR**  
PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Once upon a time, all strategy games were visual abortions and strictly for the hardcore (OK, a bit of a sweeping statement). But *Rome: Total War* changed all that, mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic, as well as staggering historical accuracy. The result is a masterpiece and a game just about anyone can enjoy. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



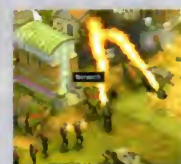
**THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH**  
PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



**SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II**  
PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



**RISE OF NATIONS**  
PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of Empire builders, *Rise of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones and Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the *Civ* genre.



**SID MEIER'S PIRATES!**  
PCZ Issue: 149 - 88%

If you've got some downtime at the close of the day, then *Pirates!* is the most relaxing (and swashbuckling) game around. Drifting around the Caribbean with a flotilla of ships and mischief on your mind is escapism at its finest.



**STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**  
PCZ Issue: 166 - 86%

A brilliant real-time tactical map and amazing space conflicts makes *Empire At War* the best *Star Wars* RTS ever. It's only let down by its land battles - otherwise, it's beyond reproach.



**AGE OF EMPIRES III**  
PCZ Issue: 162 - 84%

A sprinkling of innovation and a barrelful of lushness lets us give this a hearty endorsement, even though it doesn't stray far from the established formula. Still the best 'new world' game, and the best RTS cannons ever.

## Action/Adventure

### Must buy!



**MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**  
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



**GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS**  
PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



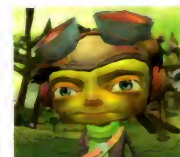
**SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY**  
PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



**FAHRENHEIT**  
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



**PSYCHONAUTS**  
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



**BEYOND GOOD & EVIL**  
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Illius is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



**PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES**  
PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.



## MMOs

**Must buy!**



### WORLD OF WARCRAFT

**PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%**  
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



### EVERQUEST II

**PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%**  
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



### GUILD WARS

**PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%**  
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



### EYE ONLINE

**PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%**  
*Elite* online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



### CITY OF HEROES

**PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%**  
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beans shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

## Simulation

**Must buy!**



### X3: REUNION

**PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%**  
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



### IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

**PCZ Issue: 128 - 89%**  
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



### MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

**PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%**  
No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



### FREELANCER

**PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%**  
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



### FALCON 4.0

**PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%**  
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series. *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

## Driving/Racing

**Must buy!**



### GT LEGENDS

**PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%**  
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



### GTR

**PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%**  
As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, shunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.



### LIVE FOR SPEED

**PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%**  
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



### NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

**PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%**  
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



### Toca RACE DRIVER 3

**PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%**  
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as petrol. With a massive collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

## God games

**Must buy!**



### THE MOVIES

**PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%**  
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



### BLACK & WHITE 2

**PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%**  
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



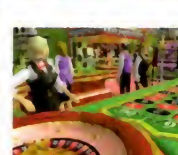
### CIVILIZATION IV

**PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%**  
A Buyer's Guide without a *Orv* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



### EVIL GENIUS

**PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%**  
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



### VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

**PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%**  
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

## Sport

**Must buy!**



### PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

**PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%**  
Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of *Pro Evo* ever, also the best footy game ever.



### FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

**PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%**  
One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.



### TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

**PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%**  
Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. *Tiger 06* is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



### NHL 06

**PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%**  
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.



### MADDEN 2005

**PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%**  
Although the 2006 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 2007 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

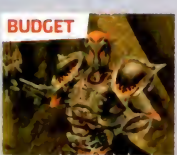
## RPGs

**Must buy!**



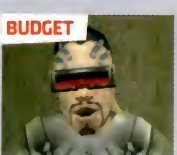
### KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

**PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%**  
*KOTOR* is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



### THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

**PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%**  
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



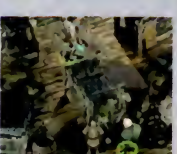
### DEUS EX

**PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%**  
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



### NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

**PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%**  
It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.



### PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

**PCZ Issue: 86 - 87%**  
Compelling storylines, great characterisation and a heart of pure darkness - *Planescape* is the best thing Interplay's Black Isle Studios ever gave us.

# INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

### April/May

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006  
CITY LIFE  
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH  
FINAL FANTASY XI TREASURES OF AHT URGHAN  
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE  
HEARTS OF IRON II: DOOMSDAY  
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY  
RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS  
SEED  
SPELLFORCE 2  
THE GODFATHER  
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND  
WAR ON TERROR  
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2  
PACIFIC STORM  
TORTUGA: TWO TREASURES  
X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL MOVIE GAME

### REST OF 2006

AUTO ASSAULT  
GUILD WARS: FACTIONS  
HELLGATE: LONDON  
HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V  
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2  
PARAWORLD  
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE  
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR  
TABULA RASA  
TITAN QUEST  
UT2007

EIDOS  
MONTE CRISTO  
ATARI  
SQUARE ENIX  
VALVE  
PARADOX INTERACTIVE  
EIDOS  
MICROSOFT  
RUNESTONE  
JOWOOD  
EA  
EIDOS  
MONTE CRISTO  
OXYGEN  
BUKA  
ASCARON  
ACTIVISION

NCSOFT  
NCSOFT  
NAMCO  
UBISOFT  
ATARI  
JOWOOD  
SEGA  
MIDWAY  
NCSOFT  
THQ  
MIDWAY



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PCZONE

## HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

## Adios Intel?

**H**OW MANY SERVERS do you think Google has? Thirty? Ninety-nine?

Perhaps a few hundred, or maybe something silly like 2,000? Imagine the size of room you'd need to house all those – then double it for the all the air ducts, switches and walkways that accompany them.

In 2004, while the company was beefing up its infrastructure for the Gmail rollout, it was revealed that it had 100,000 machines – each with a Pentium processor and between 2-4GB RAM. This month, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the world's favourite search engine has "more than 200,000", and that it's busy switching from Intel to AMD technology, instantly raising earnings estimates for Advanced Micro Devices. And because all new Googleboxes are being specified with Opteron CPUs, AMD's predicted share of the server market has risen accordingly.

Could this be a problem for Intel? Possibly. Although Intel still dominates the global marketplace, AMD has a stranglehold grip on the US desktop market: eight in every ten American consumers buy Athlon. And word is spreading that Intel's sovereignty is no longer based on merit – gamers prefer AMD, as apparently does Google. The moment Dell decides to offer Athlons in its PCs, Intel will see its lead shrink to nothing.

We prefer AMD too. Having waved goodbye to our old Alienware system, PC ZONE has a brand new Xworks replacement based around an Athlon FX-60. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go and crank up some detail sliders...

## BLUSTER LA VISTA

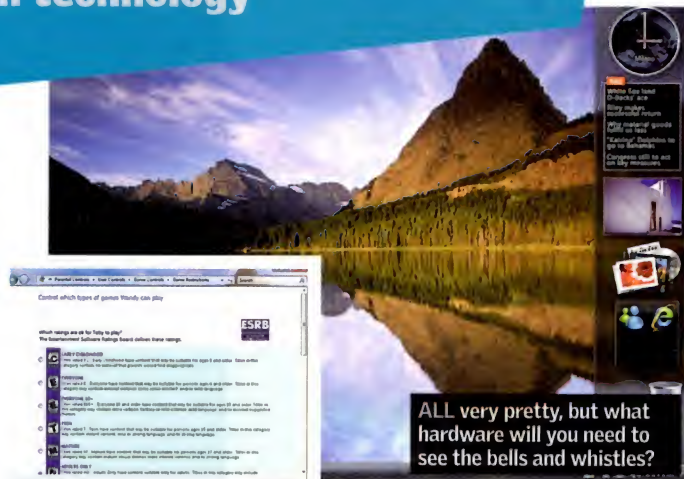
New versions of Windows Vista likely to mystify users

**MICROSOFT HAS ANNOUNCED** no fewer than five flavours of Windows Vista, the operating system it plans to ship in the autumn. The versions are Home Basic, Home Premium and Ultimate for home users, plus Business and Enterprise for the corporate sector. A sixth addition, Starter, is aimed at emerging markets. The successor to Windows XP is said to give "clarity and confidence" to users, but many are already perplexed.

Put the Business and Enterprise packages from your mind, and forget Starter. Home Basic doesn't come with Vista's sparkly new Aero interface (which might be a good thing, seeing as it's an abundance of transparent windows, glass-

effect progress bars and other pointless baubles which tax your hardware). Neither does it have Google-like HDD indexing and searching, integrated CD/DVD burning, nor full Media Center capabilities. For these you need Home Premium or Ultimate.

Pricing is uncertain, but with Home Basic set to cost no less than £79, Home Premium is likely to be at least £149 – and that's before the processor and video card upgrade you'll need to run it at a decent pace. It's at this point you need to ask yourself, why? While Vista will be better engineered and more secure than what you have now, a properly maintained install of Windows XP is adequate for gaming and should last a good many years yet. [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)



ALL very pretty, but what hardware will you need to see the bells and whistles?

## NEWS ROUND-UP

NVIDIA has just launched the GeForce 7900 GT and GTX, and ATI has been slashing prices in an effort to divert everyone's gaze. Versions of the Radeon X1800 XT can already be found for under £235, and the X1900 XTX (see review, page 100) is set to dip towards the £300 mark, making it both cheaper and faster than the 7800 GTX. In addition, the new GeForce 7600 GT will be met head-on by the Radeon X1800 GT. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Head on over to [www.atl.com](http://www.atl.com) and [www.nvidia.com](http://www.nvidia.com) for more.

## THE X FACTOR

Dribbling inevitable, bibs to be worn at all times

**GET A LOAD OF** this: Xworks X6a-64 with an AMD Athlon FX-60 on an ASUS A8N-SLI Premium, plus 2GB RAM, Radeon X1900 XTX, a 150GB Raptor for Windows and a whole 500GB more for games and clobber. Want one? You can order a system just like it online – although you will need the thick end of £2,000 before it's despatched to you.

As with the X8I-SLIDC (issue 160, 82%), the X6a-64 is designed and built by

Xworks Interactive, the people who supply games developers, animators and CAD designers throughout Europe. We can't speak for anyone else, but we can say that we're rather pleased with ours. [www.xworksinteractive.com](http://www.xworksinteractive.com)



IT'S big and it's dreamy. We like.

Seagate is planning to demonstrate the first wireless hard drive. Built using Intel's version of an ultrawideband technology called Wireless USB, signals from a regular USB connection are sent over radio. It's not clear how security is handled, nor how the connections will be established – whether you have to hook it up to your PC first and 'teach' it about the drive, or whether you can simply search for it. Either way though, it's still exciting to think it's how we'll all be working just a short while from now. [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)

**WARNING:**  
THIS MONTH'S  
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

**VARIABLE CLOCK FREQUENCIES:** When somebody buys you four clocks, then no clocks, then a clock every Tuesday, then no clocks again. **SUPER-MULTI:** Massive bags of crisps which only have the good flavours, none of that ready salted crap. **SUBWOOFER:** A tiny dog. **X8I-SLIDC:** Was once elected mayor of a small town in New Zealand due to a legal loophole, before it promptly overheated, setting fire to the town and killing seven women. **AERO INTERFACE:** I once saw a lady on the bus put an entire Aero interface into her mouth – I bet she didn't feel the bubbles melt. **MXM:** Popular lads mag with vowels removed for easier reading. Occasionally shows nipple.



## SPECCY TWAT

A closer look at the Pyro's specifications

If you've ever felt a twinge of excitement when the level changes in *Battlefield 2*, turning the game into a race between you and everyone else to be first down the road in a tank, then you already know why you want one. The Pyro is the quickest level-loader *PC ZONE* has ever seen, thanks in part to the optional striped Caviar disks and standard 2GB RAM. The dual ASUS set-up makes it feel fluent at all detail levels (but as with any SLI or CrossFire system, you're going to have two out-of-date cards by summer), and although you may turn your nose up at the fact it uses onboard sound, it's still 7.1 – few people would recognise the difference between it and the Audigy or X-Fi anyway. The 939-pin Athlon engine isn't the fastest chip on sale – the FX is reserved for the flagship £1,970 Pyro 64-FX – but it's still man enough for the job, and can be upgraded at a later date should you so desire. There are a few occasions where the 4000+ seems to hold up the proceedings, but they're at such ludicrous frame rates that only the ludicrous will be bothered.



## PYRO 64-SLI

PRICE £1,535 MANUFACTURER Wired2Fire PHONE N/A WEBSITE [wired2fire.com](http://wired2fire.com)

**ELEVEN ISSUES HAVE** been and gone since the Pyro 64-SLI (issue 156, 86%) rocked the *PC ZONE* test bench, and it's nice to see it back again. Wired2Fire's second-in-command is now faster, bigger and more handsome than before, yet is £500 less alarming to boot. The other key factor in its favour is that it's still supported by the band of gamers who build it rather than by a man in India who introduces himself as Chris and sounds like Peter Sellers auditioning for *The Goon Show*.

It also remains something of an experience. Despite the price cut, and despite SLI being a configuration with which we're all familiar, you still come away feeling slightly decadent. Buying one will not be the result of rational

thinking: you don't need a Pyro, like you don't need two hours in a hot bath with a Montecristo No 2, a bottle of Louis Roeder and the last six months of *Razzle*. But in both cases, your life will be inexplicably better for it.

### VROOOM!

The benchmarks say it best. 24,469 in 3DMark03, 10,799 in 3DMark05 and 5,411 in 3DMark06. A solid 160fps in *Half-Life 2* at 1024x768 (113fps at 1280x1024), with every scene smoother than a cue ball. While these aren't numbers to punt you from your seat, they remain very pleasing for such a keenly-priced system. The *PC ZONE* Gamemark – an average frame-rate taken from all our game-based benchmarks – came out at 105fps,

making it the best value system we've tested in terms of bang for buck. No kidding. What's more, if you're lucky enough to have a 20-inch or larger LCD, you'll also be excited to hear that it's possible to run your favourite titles at your screen's native resolution without the system having to puff on its inhaler at key moments.

### SLINKY BLACK

In addition to that, the Thermaltake case the Pyro lives in is now significantly nicer than the old one too. The piano black finish is more menacing than the shadow on a smoker's lung, and the sheer size of the thing – it's over half a metre long – make it stand out in any room. Like last time, the downside is that it can still be rather noisy when pushed.

### SPECIFICATION

Power Hiper 525W True Power Processor AMD Athlon 64 4000+ Motherboard ASUS A8N-SLI Graphics 1 ASUS GeForce 7800 GT Graphics 2 ASUS GeForce 7800 GT Memory Corsair 2GB PC3200 HDD 1 WD Caviar SE 250GB HDD 2 WD Caviar SE 250GB Optical 1 16x DVD-ROM Optical 2 DVD+/-RW Sound Onboard OS Windows XP Home Warranty 1 year





# DX1 INPUT SYSTEM

PRICE £123 MANUFACTURER Ergodex PHONE N/A WEBSITE [ergodex.com](http://ergodex.com)



**HERE'S A DEVICE** which achieves something no multi-million transistor processor can: it makes playing games a pleasure. Sure, that X1900 XTX and FX-60 will make things smoother, more realistic and altogether over-indulgent, but will it make them feel any better? No, not really. Your favourite shooter on high detail is the same game as it is in jumbo chunky mode, and although I probably shouldn't admit it, any difference between them is purely superficial.

In actual fact, your surroundings and how you interact with your PC are more important.

Your screen, mouse, keyboard, speakers – even the chair you sit in and what you had for breakfast make a difference.

If you're not comfortable, you're never going to enjoy games and be good at them. Which is where the DX1 comes in. It's

basically a 'blank keyboard' with 25 keys to position where you want them. Rest your hand on the pad and work out where your fingers lie and where you can reach without stretching. Place keys at the appropriate locations, teach the management software what each one does, and be amazed at how WSAD-based layouts suddenly seem stupid. The software also lets you record macros so you can hit one key and perform a whole string of commands sequentially.

The underside of each key is coated in a special adhesive which bonds with the pad surface, but which also breaks loose the moment you twist it – there's a lot of fun to be had simply experimenting. And because the keys sit on a separate plastic tray and 'talk' to the electronics via inductive coupling, you can create different layouts for different games and print out crib sheets which sit between the tray and the pad beneath.

In short then, brilliant. Just brilliant. But expensive.

PCZONE



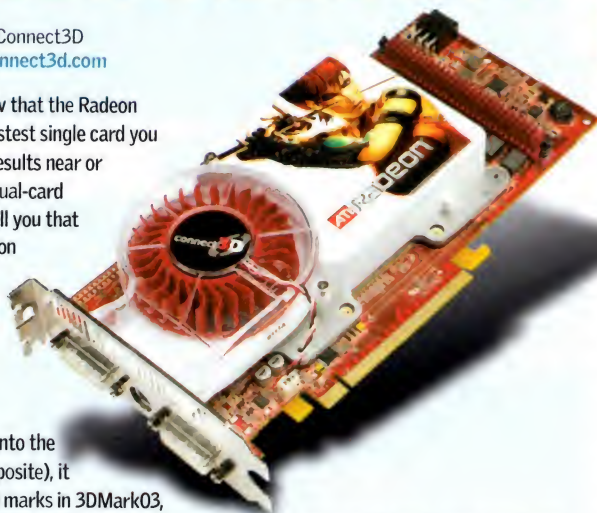
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# RADEON X1900 XTX

PRICE £382  
MANUFACTURER Connect3D  
WEBSITE [www.connect3d.com](http://www.connect3d.com)

**I CAN TELL** you now that the Radeon X1900 XTX is the fastest single card you can buy, delivering results near or exceeding those of dual-card set-ups. I can also tell you that the Connect3D version is the one to aim for – stripped of stupid freebies, it's a simple and honest package and also the least expensive. Dropped into the Pyro-64 SLI (see opposite), it breezed past 18,000 marks in 3DMark03, past 9,000 in 3DMark05 and approached 5,000 in 3DMark03. It was also good for 187fps in *Half-Life 2* and 112.7fps in *Doom 3*.

But with the way benchmark scores ping-pong between NVIDIA and ATI month after month, we're sure to see a GeForce



nose out in front very shortly, and with few processors able to keep up with this relentless gathering of pace, buying an XTX will require the purchase of a serious CPU to make the most of it. Are your pockets deep enough?

# 4GB MICRO HARD DRIVE

PRICE £120  
MANUFACTURER Imaton  
WEBSITE [imaton.co.uk](http://imaton.co.uk)

**THE MICRO HARD DRIVE** is a tiny USB 2.0 device with a whopping 4GB capacity. Inside is Toshiba's 0.85-inch drive, recognised by Guinness World Records as the world's smallest HDD, a mechanical storage device that's shock-resistant to 1000G.

If you want to use it for more than just file transportation, Imaton's freely downloadable Security Manager Software allows you to password-protect and synchronise your data – if you have two or more PCs, it's now possible to carry all your stuff between them in one journey. When you consider that two 120-minute MPEG-2 movies weigh in at around 3GB, a 4GB handbag is almost overkill.



But if you're into digital photography, collecting MP3s or movies, it's an invaluable accessory. The only obvious flaw is the chunky USB connector, which prevents you plugging it in beside an existing device.

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## HOW TO...

## CHOOSE A LAPTOP

**Need:**Desire for laptop,  
appropriate funds**Time**

One hour

**Difficulty level**

Phil Wand

HAL 9000

Medium doofus

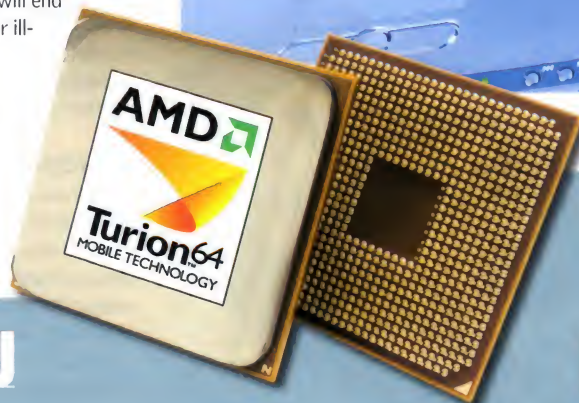
Big Brother contestant

← *Jerome Sullivan*Thinking of going mobile? *Phil Wand* makes a list of what you need to know...

**Y**ou may not think it, but buying a laptop is a pretty major commitment. In every practical sense, a laptop is a sealed units whose warranty you'll void by just reaching for a screwdriver. You can't upgrade the graphics card and you're stuck with whatever screen you choose. The same goes for the keyboard, motherboard and processor – if it's too slow, too small, or won't play the games you like, it'll forever be that way.

So a laptop is a computer time capsule, a snapshot of technology available at the time you bought it. Get the specifications wrong and within a very short time you'll find it sluggish, irksome and fit for little more than watching DVDs in the bath. Plus, if you did decide to flog it on eBay, you'll be lucky to get back a fifth of what you originally paid, and hence will end up shedding a tear for your ill-spent cash.

But don't be nervous. Getting the specifications right doesn't require specialist knowledge or training. All you need is to read on and follow this handy guide...



**Core Duo** is Intel's new dual-core processor for PCs and newer Macs. AMD's equivalent is the **Turion**, but it's not recommended for gaming. A modern laptop's **battery** lasts at least **two hours**, but if you're playing games, expect to **halve that**. Many laptops can be fitted with a **second battery** in a special compartment, but don't waste your money until you know you need it. **Audio** is an issue with laptops, as **size restraints** mean they sound **crap**. Go for an **integrated subwoofer**, and if your laptop doesn't have **5.1 or 7.1 surround output**, you can always add it later through a **USB soundcard**. Annoyingly, **few games** support a **true widescreen format**, but this may change as sales of widescreen monitors rise. **MXM** is the NVIDIA-driven technology which tempted people with the ability to **upgrade mobile video cards**, à la desktops, but the technology has yet to **filter down to end users**.

## 01 CPU

YOU'LL not be wanting one of these.

## MOBILE CPU OVERVIEW

	Battery	Cost	Gaming
<b>Intel Processors</b>			
Mobile Pentium 4	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆	★★★★★
Pentium 4 M	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Celeron M	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★☆☆
<b>AMD Processors</b>			
Athlon 64	★☆☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆	★★★★★
Turion 64	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★☆☆

The Mobile Pentium 4 and Mobile Athlon 64 are modified, battery-aware versions of the desktop processors you know. But you can buy your laptop with a more recent engine: Intel's new Core Duo chip replaces the Pentium M and is the current weapon of choice for mobile users. It uses significantly less power, produces less heat and despite running at slower, variable clock frequencies, attains real-world speeds matching those of high-end desktops. Gamers should aspire to a Core Duo T2400, T2500, or T2600 machine with 1GB RAM.



## TOP TIP: LEARN TO LOVE YOUR LAPPY

There are certain aspects of our PCs we all take for granted. From simple things, such as the ability to yank the keyboard away from the monitor and slouch back in your chair, to more complex matters of changing to a better graphics card, buying a more powerful supply or upgrading cooling. You can't do any of these things with a laptop. It also takes time to get used to the smaller keyboard, and flat keys aren't conducive to enjoyable gaming. My recommendation? If you're new to laptops, buy a USB keyboard and mouse, then take the time to get used to your new purchase.

## 02 Graphics card

Like lappy processors, the Mobility Radeon and GeForce Go video cards are mobile adaptations of desktop products. For light gaming, a Mobility Radeon X700 or GeForce Go 7600 will do you admirably – even the entry-level Mobility Radeon X300 will pass muster. For more demanding titles, you need the more powerful GeForce Go 6800 Ultra, Mobility Radeon X800 or more recent X1600. If you really want to ditch the desktop, look for the GeForce Go 7800 GTX. Stay clear of Intel's Graphics Media Accelerator.



BUT you will most definitely be wanting one of these!

## 03 Screen

### LAPTOP RESOLUTIONS

	Resolution	Widescreen
XGA	1024x768	-
XGA+	1152x864	-
WXGA	1280x800	✓
SXGA	1280x1024	-
W(S)XGA	1440x900	✓
SXGA+	1400x1050	-
WSXGA	1600x1024	✓
WSXGA+	1680x1050	✓
UXGA	1600x1200	-
WUXGA	1920x1200	✓

Avoid 12- and 14-inch screens: a 17-inch panel is superb for games and movies, but if the size, weight and price of your laptop are an issue, a 15-incher will do. What really matters is how many pixels the screen can display.

Here, manufacturers persist in using acronyms rather than numbers to describe resolution, such as WSXGA and BUTSECKS, so check our chart to make sense of the stupid things.

## 04 Options

Want wireless? Don't panic, all Intel Centrino-branded laptops have it as standard. When buying AMD, you'll need to add wireless as an option. If the size of the hard drive puts you off, remember that you can always copy your game patches, MP3s and porn collection to an external HDD and hang it from one of the USB ports. The only option you need to remember is a DVD+-RW DVD drive, sometimes referred to as Super Multi, which will read from and write to all types of CD and DVD. A leather case isn't a necessity but is useful.



WESTERN Digital's Passport is a shock-absorbing USB hard drive with a capacity of up to 120GB.

## 05 Buying

Although the quality of laptops has increased exponentially over the last few years, by nature they're easier to break, and are still more likely to go wrong than your desktop. It's therefore vital that you buy from an established name – Acer, Dell, HP Compaq, Fujitsu-Siemens, Lenovo, rockdirect, Toshiba, Sony – and upgrade to a three-year warranty. You may need it. If you can't buy direct from the manufacturer, my recommendation would be Insight UK at [uk.insight.com](http://uk.insight.com).



WE liked this rockdirect XTREME CT/XCT-2.0 so much, we gave it 90% in issue 163.

## QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

If you're still scratching your head, you may find the answer here. Then again...

### ✗ Can I upgrade components?

✓ You can upgrade your memory and drives, but the overwhelming majority of laptops have everything else nailed down.

### ✗ What's all this 'desktop replacement' stuff?

✓ Many laptop manufacturers offer a model with a Pentium 4 or Athlon 64 processor. Because these are essentially desktop products, offering desktop performance, they're called desktop replacements. But a Pentium M or Core Duo makes more sense.

### ✗ Do laptops suffer dead pixels?

✓ Yes. Search for dead pixel policy at the manufacturer's website. Typically, if your screen has six or more, you can get it replaced. But six is a lot.

### ✗ How much will it cost?

✓ Decent laptops start at £599, but to play games you need £899+. And remember, every laptop comes with a monitor!





# DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



## Problems?

We've all got them you know... Up to your neck in debt? Partner sleeping around? A propensity to wake up on Saturday morning with a kebab and beer can stuck to your face? We can't help with any of those (but if you know the answers, let us know), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at [wandy@dearwandy.com](mailto:wandy@dearwandy.com), including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.

## ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTED

**Q** I get graphical corruption on most games I play. It takes the form of little blue triangles in all my games, including *Splinter Cell*, *Black & White*, *F.E.A.R.* and *Call Of Duty 2*. In *Gun*, the screen turns blocky and stutters when I'm on horseback and riding to a new location. For all these titles I have the latest patches, but nothing has made the problem go away. I've made sure Windows is updated, that my soundcard drivers are new and my GeForce 6800 Ultra always has the latest release from the NVIDIA site. Is it a hardware problem? A software problem? Should I reinstall Windows?

Tiberius

**A** Assuming you have a power supply rated at 420W or more with a minimum of 20A on the 12V rail, and assuming you've not been cocking about with overclocking tools to try and get a little extra, I'd say the 6800 Ultra has been damaged. How could something like that happen, you ask? Well, it could be down to a number of things: it could be something simple like static or a power spike, or it could even be down to heat build-up. If your case isn't adequately cooled, if the fan on the GeForce has failed or if one of the card's heat sinks isn't making proper contact with the chip underneath it, it could be that your hardware has been cooking itself quietly these past few months and is no longer feeling very well.

Extract the card and replace it with another – any will do, it doesn't have to be a 6800. If you don't see the corruption, and if your Ultra is still under warranty, send it back. If that gives you the same problem, then yes, a complete reinstall might clear out whatever's causing it, although walnuts and sledgehammers come to mind. Have you tried uninstalling your drivers and clean booting before installing the new ones?

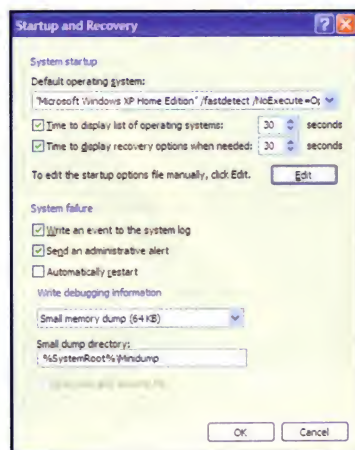
## SWAP SHOP

**Q** Having suffered recent catastrophic data loss, similar to that described by your Mr Diamond, I was overjoyed to read your excellent article on backup. I trotted off to get myself a new massive hard drive, downloaded Microsoft SyncToy and set to work. I decided to synchronise all my documents, and also to have Windows XP installed and bootable on both drives so that if one failed, I could start the other immediately. I further decided to have one drive optimised for my work, and the other for gaming. I wondered if you knew any utility that might enable me to selectively boot my drives without going into the BIOS?

Dr Jon

**A** There are a number of utilities kicking around the Web which would enable you to switch between your operating systems, but most cost money and all will modify your master boot record. And honestly, who wants untested utilities from unknown authors doing that?

Of the better shareware examples, OSL2000 from [www.osloader.com](http://www.osloader.com) costs



**MULTI-booting is a piece of piss.**

\$24.90 – a little pricey for something which does one thing – and seems to do the job without totalling your drive. Additionally, it merely nags you to register rather than timing out after 30 days.

A better bet would be Acronis Disk Director Suite, available for \$49.99 from the True Image people at [www.acronis.com](http://www.acronis.com), or Symantec's Norton PartitionMagic for \$69.99 from [www.symantec.com](http://www.symantec.com). Both are significantly more expensive, but both have significantly more features. If asked to choose between the two, the True Image fan in me would go for Disk Director Suite.

However, there is an easier way to manage multiple operating systems, especially if all you want to do is swap between them and don't need the gubbins that comes with a commercial partition manager. What you need is to edit the hidden BOOT.INI file in the top folder of your system root partition. To open and change the file, hold the Windows key and tap the Pause/Break key, then select the Advanced tab and click the Settings button in the Startup and Recovery group box. Now click the Edit button.

The 'timeout' in the top section of this file defines how long your system will wait before automatically booting the operating system defined by the 'default' value lower down. This value refers back to one of the entries in the bottom section: most users will see multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1) here, referring to the first partition of the primary hard drive (typically, when computers 'count', they start at zero). To



**TODAY'S video cards are dwarfed by their cooling paraphernalia.**

### DRIVER WATCH

Keep your PC happy

GRAPHICS		
MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.2	09-FEB-05
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 81.98	07-FEB-06

SOUND		
MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER X-Fi 2.070004	15 NOV 05
Creative	AUDIGY 2 VALUE 2.08.0002 BETA	21 SEP 05



## I'd advise you to put your nose to the AGP connector on the board to see if you can smell burnt electrics

We're living in a super-technical world, as Michael Bryson now knows



MICHAEL BRYSON'S system turns video cards into toast.

add another partition, copy and paste the entry and change partition(1) to read partition(2). To add another drive, copy and paste and change rdisk(0) to read rdisk(1). Save the file, and when you reboot, a menu will prompt you which Windows you wish to load.

Note: this is a very brief overview of a complex subject. Be sure to read Microsoft's Knowledge Base article on the subject by Googling for KB311578.

### GET YOUR ALBATRON!

**Q** I built my system 16 months ago and had no problems until January this year when, in the middle of Rome, the system froze – the BIOS reported that the CPU 'had been changed or was unusable'.

I took it to the local computer shop and they tried a new processor, but the system wouldn't POST and they told me my IC7-G was dead. I bought an Albatron PX865PEC Pro replacement and for five minutes the system started and I could use Windows. The screen then produced a double image and crashed. I headed back to the shop and have just been told the AGP slot is fried.

Could it be that my Sapphire Radeon 9800 Pro destroys motherboards? How would I tell? The shop is reluctant to try a different card, but I have the option of sending components back to the manufacturers. However, if they're

found to be fine it will just incur costs, money I could use to buy new parts.

Michael Bryson

**A** There were some rather alarming issues with early AGP cards where a mismatch of voltage and/or pin-outs would turn your motherboard into an indoor fireworks display, but that's not going to be the problem with a recent Radeon on an IC7-G. There's also the fact that, had there ever been such a serious incompatibility, your PC would have croaked the moment you first turned it on.

The cause of your problem will almost certainly be one of three things: the motherboard, the power supply or the video card. I would be disinclined to blame the motherboard because when you replaced the IC7-G the problem recurred. This leaves the power supply and video card, together with something of a quandary.

If you buy a second Albatron with a new PSU and it turns out the Radeon was at fault, you'll need another motherboard and a new video card. If you buy a second Albatron with a new video card and it was the PSU all along, there's almost no limit to the damage a failing power supply can do. The trouble is that you're going to be hard pushed finding out exactly where the problem lies, and which component caused what. You could scrutinise the Radeon's connector – a duff card will often have

## 50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



### 9 XFIRE

**EXPECT TO PAY** Free

[www.xfire.com](http://www.xfire.com)

Xfire is a rock solid instant messenger (IM) program put together with gamers in mind. As well as keeping track of all your buddies, allowing you to type and talk to them for free over your Internet connection, it acts as a server browser and version patcher – basically, everything you might need inside one application. Xfire also lets your friends know which server you're playing on, so they can join you with a simple click of the mouse – you can even chat with them without dropping out of the game.

Although the built-in browser is a little basic, lacking the bells and whistles of dedicated rivals, it

works nicely. It also talks to Battlefield 2 servers, which is more than can be said for The All-Seeing Eye. The program automatically detects what's installed on your hard drive, and the server lists can be filtered and sorted.

One of the benefits of being integrated within an IM program is that the browser can see which servers your buddies have flagged as their favourites, and you can even see what their other friends are up to. Such features make Xfire feel very friendly and hospitable.

And even if you don't use it, you've probably seen it in action. What made the program famous is its profile pages: these detail just how many hours you've spent gaming, the resulting numbers hanging like medals from forum signatures.

scorch marks on it – and put your nose close to the AGP connector on the board to see if you can smell burnt electrics, but that still doesn't tell you the root of the problem.

My advice is to spend £45 or more on a 420W power supply from a known

manufacturer, and then spend £16 or less on a Radeon 9250 SE. If you still have a black screen, the likelihood is that the board is a goner: get it replaced and try again. If it boots up, the likelihood is that the 9800 was at fault. **PCZ**

**WARNING:**  
**DON'T TRUST**  
**YOUR MATES!**

Like a number of modern mobiles, my SPV M5000 runs Windows Mobile Edition. This means that it talks with other Windows machines, and can even connect itself wirelessly to a network. The problem with this is that, if you leave it unattended in the company of friends, there's a high chance they'll start uploading all manner of unsavoury images to the device and then setting them as its desktop wallpaper. Opening the lid later in the day reveals the true depths of their depravity, and often when your better half is leaning over your shoulder. Top tip: keep Windows phones in pockets at all times.





## Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at [watchdog@pczone.co.uk](mailto:watchdog@pczone.co.uk) with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

# WATCHDOG

Rotten companies need sorting – and good ones need praising...

## CLOCKING HELL!

A year ago, Andrew Dobson spent a small fortune on some swanky components at Overclockers.co.uk. Among this collection were two top-of-the-range, XFX GeForce 6800 Ultra PCI-Express cards to power the graphics in Andrew's tasty SLI rig. The next eight months saw Andrew in gaming nirvana as he enjoyed sumptuous graphics, but in November, disaster struck when one of the cards developed a fault.

Still under warranty, Andrew sent it back to Overclockers UK who reckoned it would take "seven to ten days to process the return". Despite this claim, five weeks passed by without any progress, then Andrew was informed the manufacturer had taken the card back under warranty and that he'd have to wait for its return because SLI set-ups require two identical cards.

With still no response a month later, he made contact, only to be told he could choose a new replacement. Andrew politely refused, but ten days later received a

members of staff who were not aware that the SLI set-up needs two identical cards to work." Looks like you just can't get the staff. Overclockers also stated: "We endeavour to resolve all RMAs between seven to ten days, but in this case we had a backlog and the initial testing took longer than normal. This was further delayed when we were unable to replace the item like-for-like due to our lack of stock. The item was then returned to the manufacturer for replacement and it was some time before we were advised that they also were unable to replace it." All problems aside, Overclockers then conferred with Andrew and agreed that if Andrew paid a little extra, it would take back the old working card and replace the whole lot with two über 7800 GTX cards. Andrew's gaming nirvana continues...



HERE'S a GeForce 6800 Ultra we made earlier.

## Can anyone else match such customer service? Getting an automated response after a year and a half?

replacement card anyway. But was it his original? Nope, Overclockers had sent him a card that was a lesser model! It then offered to replace the card with an equivalent spec one (er, no), and a week later, sent him another email saying it would ship him a PowerColour ATI Radeon X850XT! Overclockers clearly hadn't grasped the basic principles of SLI cards...

Getting straight onto Overclockers UK, it soon became apparent this was one big mix-up: "The run up to Christmas is our busiest period, and so additional staff are taken on. As with any new member of staff, there's an initial period of training followed by an additional learning curve. The replacement products were sent out by

## JUST AN EMAIL AWAY...

Reader Dan Kelly recently emailed us with a most humorous tale. "The other day I received this email from Antec tech support: 'Thank you for using Antec's online technical support! We will answer your question in approximately one business day.' It struck me as odd as I didn't remember writing to them, but then I remembered, just as I saw the date on the email: September 8... 2004!

I had written to Antec about a minor fault with a P160 case I'd bought. A couple of the fancy rubber grommet thingies designed to hold the fan in place and reduce

noise were broken. It was no big deal and in the end I used good old metal screws, but I'd contacted Antec to see if it could ship me out a couple of spares.

Can anyone match such for customer support 'efficiency'? Getting an automated response (not even a real person) a year and a half after the initial query!? Oh, and the company still hasn't answered my question."

Antec's tardy response has impressed us so much that we've decided to take a leaf out of its book and refrain from commenting until summer 2007. **PC7**

**THE ACCUSED**

**Antec**  
The Power of You

**OcUK**

**Guilty until proven innocent**



## SAINTS NOT SINNERS....

**BELKIN**

Reader Dave Mills owned a Belkin wireless router that worked fine with his PCs but refused to work alongside his Xbox 360, so he got in contact with Belkin. Despite a flurry of emails between Dave and

customer support, as well as various different settings and changes being tried out, the router was no closer to working. Rather than give up on Dave, Belkin gave him a free upgrade to a much newer model to fix the problem. Dave sent off his old router and within five days, had received a new router which worked perfectly with both his PC and the Xbox. Hurrah for Belkin!





# Gaming PCs with Bite!



"A Killer System" 89% PC Gamer Dec 05

## Pyro 64 - SLI

"Guaranteed to fly" 88% PC Gamer Aug 05

"Fastest thing we've tested" 86% PC Zone Jul 05



Call 08701 999 283 or visit our website to configure your extreme gaming PC

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**REMEMBER:**  
YOU ALSO NEED  
MONEY FOR FOOD  
AND CLOTHING

We are legally required to remind readers that money splashed on hardware may be better spent on families, wives and girlfriends. PC ZONE isn't liable for any estrangement that may ensue.

# HARDWARE DIVIDE

Rich or poor, an adonis or Wayne Rooney, we've got the hardware solutions for you...

## LOADED?

### GRAPHICS

#### X1900 XTX

EXPECT TO PAY £382

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE [www.connect3d.com](http://www.connect3d.com)

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.



### PROCESSOR

#### ATHLON 64 FX-60

EXPECT TO PAY £740

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE [amd.com](http://amd.com)

Running at 2.6GHz, the Athlon 64 FX-60 actually clocks slightly slower than its predecessor, the FX-57, but runs dual-cores each with a 128KB L1 cache. In essence, it's seriously bloody fast. If you're looking to build an overclocked colossus which smokes 99% of other systems out there, look no further.

### MOTHERBOARD

#### FATALITY AN8 SLI

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER ABIT

WEBSITE [www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)

Designed specifically for gaming, the nForce4 SLI-based Fatality AN8 supports all 939-pin AMD processors. As well as SLI support it features ABIT's Guru Panel, a front-mounted display unit for overclockers. The board also uses a bevy of ABIT features, including OTES cooling and AudioMAX 7.1 onboard audio.

### HDD

#### RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £180

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE [www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

### SCREEN

#### MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

EXPECT TO PAY £360

MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi

WEBSITE [www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk](http://www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk)

The LCD1970GX is a 19in LCD screen, with an 8ms response time and an inky black glass screen that saturates all the colours and darkens the shadows. It includes a joystick controller for the on-screen display, and a four-port USB hub.

### SOUND CARD

#### SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £179

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.

### SPEAKERS

#### Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £220

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE [www.logitech.co.uk](http://www.logitech.co.uk)

They'll cost you over £200, but they're also the best speakers we've ever tested at PC ZONE. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

## SKINT?

### GRAPHICS

#### X800 GTO

EXPECT TO PAY £115

MANUFACTURER GECUBE

WEBSITE [gecube.com.tw](http://gecube.com.tw)

You could save yourself a tenner and go for the 8-pipeline GT, but you'd be missing out. The GTO is without doubt the mainstream card to go for: an overclocking dream, it can trump the 6800 GT on maximum detail and this GECUBE comes with a heat-pipe and sensible bundle.



### PROCESSOR

#### ATHLON 64 3000+

EXPECT TO PAY £95

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE [www.amd.co.uk](http://www.amd.co.uk)

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty in the BIOS, Athlon 64s can be highly rewarding – particularly so on an nForce4 motherboard. Famous for overclocking and top performance in games, there's really no alternative. This AMD chip is the one to have if you're building to a budget.

### MOTHERBOARD

#### A8N-E NFORCE4 ULTRA

EXPECT TO PAY £80

MANUFACTURER ASUSTek

WEBSITE [uk.asus.com](http://uk.asus.com)

The A8N-E supports the full range of Athlon 64 FX, dual-core Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon 64 chips, plus PCI Express and 7.1 channel audio. The nForce4 Ultra chipset has more features than a circus has clowns, and ASUS includes a raft of its own, as well as some serious overclocking tools.

### HDD

#### 1200JD SATA

EXPECT TO PAY £55

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE [www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

### SCREEN

#### VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY £152

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE [www.viewsonic.co.uk](http://www.viewsonic.co.uk)

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

### SOUND CARD

#### SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £34

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

### SPEAKERS

#### INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £40

MANUFACTURER Creative

WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



# PLAY NEW XBOX GAMES WITH EVERY ISSUE OF Official **XBOX** Magazine

More

[HTTP://XBOX.OXM.CO.UK](http://XBOX.OXM.CO.UK)



## 3 FREE GIFTS!

+ EXCLUSIVE FIRST TOMB RAIDER REVIEW!

## PLAY THESE XBOX GAMES NOW!

PLAYABLE TRIAL VERSIONS OF...

- ➔ Driver Parallel Lines
- ➔ Fight Night Round 3
- ➔ TOCA Race Driver 3
- ➔ Commandos Strike Force



### HUGE DOUBLE-SIDED POSTER!





# PC ZONE READERSHIP SURVEY 2006

**WIN!**  
**A SONY 32-INCH**  
**LCD HD-READY**  
**TV WORTH**  
**OVER**  
**£1,000!**

**H**ERE AT **PC ZONE**, we want to ensure we continue to provide you with the best games magazine around. So we'd like to find out more about you, your gaming habits and what you think about **PC ZONE**. Once you've finished reading this issue just go to:

**[www.gamesurvey.co.uk](http://www.gamesurvey.co.uk)**

and enter the password: **mb5** to fill in our online survey

As a special thank you, all completed surveys submitted by May 8, 2006 will be entered into a prize draw with a chance to win a fantastic SONY KDL-S32A12U 32-inch LCD HD-ready TV or a SONY PSP.

Please be honest – your answers don't affect your chances of winning. Good luck!

If you don't have access to the Internet, you can obtain a paper copy of the survey by sending a self-addressed envelope (no stamp needed) to the following freepost address:

**Charles Hutchings (Games Survey)**  
**Market Research**  
**Future Publishing**  
**Freepost**  
**30 Monmouth Street**  
**Bath BA1 2XF**

#### **TERMS AND CONDITIONS:**

No purchase is necessary to enter the prize draw. If you are under 16, please get permission first from a parent/guardian to fill in the survey. Employees of Future Publishing or its sponsors may not enter. Prize winners will be notified by telephone. Prize draw open to UK residents only. No correspondence will be entered into. The sponsors reserve the right to supply prizes of equivalent value rather than those illustrated. No cash alternatives. Only one entry per person is permitted.



**OR A**  
**FANTASTIC**  
**RUNNER-UP**  
**PRIZE OF A**  
**SONY PSP!**







PCZONE

# FREEPLAY

Skint? Play PC games for zero notes...

STAFF WRITER Steve Hogarty

## WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE GAMES!

### Mouse hunt

**A** HALF-FINISHED packet of Walkers Sensations I'd absent-mindedly left on my floor after falling asleep watching cartoons at 1am was all the beast desired. It was half-past four in the dead of night before it made its move, the thunderous smashing of its feet startling me from my slumber.

I ran for the light switch, "Turn on!" I screamed. "For god's sake turn on!" Light flooded the room, and then I saw it, a snarling mound of greasy black hair about 2ft long, eyes like burning coals, teeth like big white shovels and lips covered in Thai Sweet Chicken flavouring: a mouse. It barked at me angrily, then shouted something extremely insulting and charged off towards my wardrobe, disappearing behind it.

At first I was scared: there was a crisp-eating behemoth in my wall and I'm pretty sure it wanted me dead. Then, as I set up the industrial-strength traps, I realised that the mouse was really only looking for something for nothing - his life is all about finding free things. Just like my life. Unlike me though, he wasn't willing to share it with you, so now he's dead.

### Try this!

Money for old rope



As a way of rewarding your consumerism, *Need For Speed: Most Wanted* will automatically start you off with \$40,000 to spend if you have the previous game, *NFS: Underground 2*, installed on your PC already. Now you can buy even more annoying lights for your car...



SUPER squids.

### 112 Demo Pages

Get your free games here!



HOLOCAUST hostiles.

### 114 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



OFFENSIVE ornithology.

### 118 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



PHILOSOPHICAL philandering.

### 120 Play!

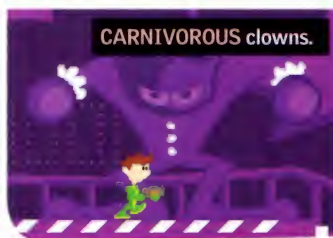
Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



DICTATORIAL dilemmas.

### 128 Conquer the Earth in Civ IV

Get ready for some iron fisting



CARNIVOROUS clowns.

### 131 How To Make A Game

Charles Cecil rates *Gibbage!*

PCZONE  
FREE-O-METER



0  
HOURS

\*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



199.8  
HOURS\*



# Demos

On the DVD – free games galore!



## DISC TROUBLES?

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email [support@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:support@futurenet.co.uk), including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



## THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II



Command ginger-bearded dwarves in EA's precious *LOTR* RTS

[www.ea.com/official/lordoftherings/bfme2/us/](http://www.ea.com/official/lordoftherings/bfme2/us/)



**WE OFTEN WONDER** what it would be like to take a dwarf out on the lash. Upon arriving at our local pub, stumping up for beers would be no problem with our bearded friend's stash of gems and jewels. He'd get pints of Stella all round and no doubt drink us under the table.

Dwarves are reliable too; he'd always wear proper shoes to get into

the nightclubs (never trainers) and we wouldn't need to lend him money for the cloakroom. He'd impress us by paying the toilet attendant with rubies, and then use the entire glass of Old Spice on his beard.

Of course, kebab shop fights would also be a thing of the past; nobody's going to accuse us of insulting their girlfriend when we've got a midget with a four-foot hammer in tow. All in all, we really want to go drinking with a dwarf. Oh, and play this *Battle For Middle-Earth II* demo – it's got dwarves in it.



### DWARVEN DREAMS

Congratulations, you made the right choice. To win the demo skirmish is going to take all of your skill and cunning (unless you're playing on Easy), so dispatch those little dwarf workers and start building beautiful mines.



### COGS OF WAR

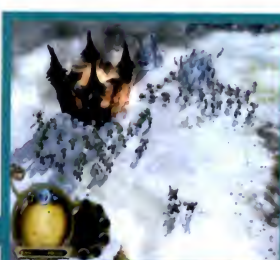
With a few minks bringing in the resources, you're free to build up a mighty army of dwarf warriors. Try building some walls for added effect – they won't protect you from wall-scaling goblins, but they make your base look satisfyingly menacing.

**MY PRECIOUS...** Goblins or dwarves? The choice is obvious



### GINGER MARCH

An army of redheads is enough to make even the most hardened of goblins wet their lincolns. Try out the handy new formation button to put your dwarves in either defensive or offensive positions. Now thwart those parsy goblins!



### AXE JUSTICE

The goblins are no match for the bearded titans; the day is won and the goblin lord is now a smouldering ashly mess on the ground. Don't feel sorry for them, though – everyone back to the dwarf base for beers and ping pong!





## BLACK & WHITE 2

The god game's black, and it's alright too

[www.lionhead.com](http://www.lionhead.com)

IT'S BEEN NEARLY six months since we awarded *Black & White 2* a masterly 93 per cent, so if you haven't bought it already you're clearly holding out for some kind of freebie. Something to give you a taster. Something that contains the same god, creature, good/evil gameplay, perhaps, but isn't the full version. Hang on... Let me see if

we've got anything. Something like that. Um... No. Sorry about that. Let's talk about something else instead. Have you seen the two-for-one offers down Tesco? I think it's pressure to overbu... What? It's a *Black & White 2* demo!



### Creatures On Patrol

A concise zoological encyclopaedia, also free



#### MONKEY

Here we have the noble monkey. Most famous for their love of bananas, wearing dungarees and punching billers who upset Clint Eastwood. Monkeys can solve a Rubik's Cube in under two minutes, though some take it a bit.



#### COW

The cow is a big stupid idiot that has to wear a bell just to remind it to eat grass. "I'm hungry. What's for dinner?" Ding ding. "Oh yeah, grass." When not eating grass, cows can be found lying on grass or having a grass break on a nearby mound of grass.

## THE BEST OF THE REST



### CHAMP MAN 2006

Hi, I'm *Champ Man 2006*, one of the best-known footy management games around. I've got tons of stats and what-not, and I'll let you play the first six months of a league for free. That's the gestation period of a cat.

[www.championshipeamanager.co.uk](http://www.championshipeamanager.co.uk)



### TOCA 3 MULTIPLAYER

I'm *TOCA*. I'm that super-realistic racing simulator, and if you release me from the shiny data cage, I'll be so grateful I'll let you tear around three of my tracks with your friends. You can't say fairer than that. Try. You can't.

[www.codemasters.co.uk/tocaracedriver3](http://www.codemasters.co.uk/tocaracedriver3)



### FPS CREATOR

Pfft. Call cars exciting? I'm *FPS Creator*, and I give you the power to design your own shooters. Can you imagine a room full of ammo? Your mission, to shoot an unarmed prisoner? If you can imagine that, then I can help you make it a Valve-toppling reality.

[www.fpscreator.com](http://www.fpscreator.com)



### ACT OF WAR

Ignore everyone else here, I'm an RTS based in the near future, at a time when an energy crisis has caused no end of global rumpus. My demo contains single and multiplayer versions, and to be brutally honest, I'm the only one here that lets you blow stuff up. Therefore, I win.

[www.dan.com/actofwar](http://www.dan.com/actofwar)

## FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

War is hell in THQ's military simulator

[www.fullspectrumwarrior.com](http://www.fullspectrumwarrior.com)

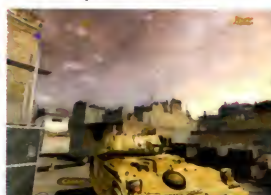
IF YOU'RE A newcomer to the *Full Spectrum Warrior* series, you might be surprised when instead of the whimsical *Specy* styling of *Atic Atac* and *JetPac*, you find old Smitty getting shot to pieces by a concealed militia machine-gunner.

That's because this is the demo of Pandemic's military sim, *Ten Hammers*. It includes lots of ducking behind turned-over fridges and shooting at foreigners in an imaginary country. Just like the stories granddad used to tell, the old loon.



### TANKS VERY MUCH

Say hello to my big, armour-plated friend



#### My New Ride

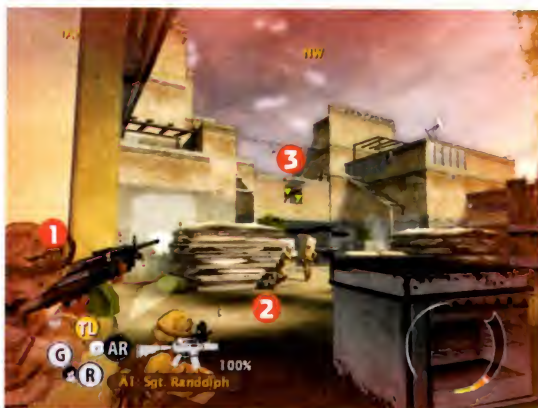
The selection of beefy new vehicles includes this tank which you can pilot through run-down city streets, making whooping noises like a real soldier.



#### Kablamo!

Any foreigners who foolishly contest the might of your new toy can be dispatched using the mounted machine guns. Easy, tiger!

### FULLY SPEC'D Know your Tic Tacs. I mean tactics...



1 As well as setting areas of fire for your troops, you can use covering fire to allow your plucky team-mates to leg it across the battlefield.

2 In *Ten Hammers* you can split your squad into separate teams of two, allowing you to easily sneak around the side and flank the enemy.

3 When the enemy is hiding behind cover like a girly coward, use manual aiming to look down your rifle scope and peg the smug gits right in the face.

### SPELLFORCE 2

[spellforce.jowood.com/sf2](http://spellforce.jowood.com/sf2)



Free your fantasy plinks as you rubbier this *SpellForce 2* demo to the wear and tear of your heroic old adventures. Watch the amazing movie on the movie DVD and then dive into a demo's only to experience the thrill of role-playing, strategy you set.

### WARPATH

[www.fileshack.com/file.x?fid=8472](http://www.fileshack.com/file.x?fid=8472)



The angriest sort of path known to mankind, *WarPath*'s gun-blazing goodness is available to you in demo form right now. Use first-person view, map called *Break*, and one Capture The Flag map called *Rush* await your various perils. *Break* and *Rush* get it!





## SNIPPETS



### HALL OF MIRRORS

This recently released *Equilibrium*-inspired total conversion lets you blast your way through a full story mode as cleric John Preston, the super-cool gunkata expert with a penchant for flipping off stuff and killing bad guys with amazing style. Gunkata, by the way, is that blindingly awesome thing they do in the movies when they shoot two people at once. Expect a full review next month.

hom.paynereactor.com



### DS JOYPAD

When we're not playing PC games or sleeping, statistics suggest that everyone in the *ZONE* team has a DS in their hand. Now the time has come to unify our two greatest gaming loves by using Nintendo's genius handheld as a wireless PC joyypad! OK, so it's not suited to much more than SNES emulation, but we love it.

snipurl.com/n22y

# MOBSTER MODSTER

*Mafia: Cutthroat* makes us some sort of offer...

www.mafia-cutthroat.net

**AS I SEE** the world of the mafia, it's a sad, hero-less world, led by a slobber-jowelled man who looks like he's fighting his way out of an avalanche of necks. To some, though, it's a romantic hidden world of money, power and classy chicks who don't ask questions – and these are the kind of people who're working on this *Half-Life 2* mod.

The development team is heavily playing up the 'film noir experience', so you can expect black and white, a sense of brooding and the essential lingering shot of a buxom saxophone wearing a smoky fedora. The slightly overtitled *Mafia: Cutthroat – Traces Of Red* is currently around two-thirds complete, so expect to be terrorising shopkeepers – not to mention murdering your friend because you fancy his wife – sooner than you previously thought.



THIS guy's airplane impression is top-notch.

THE cast of *Cats* falls mysteriously ill.

# EVERQUEST II: KINGDOM OF SKY

Ten copies of the new *EQII* expansion waiting for you to win!

**PAULDRONS! ONE OF** the many new features added to *EverQuest II* in the new expansion, *Kingdom Of Sky*, along with more levels, more guild stuff and a whole lot of other things too. Want to win it? Can you answer a question and concentrate long enough to write that answer on a postcard?

If you answered 'yes', then listen up. We've got ten copies of

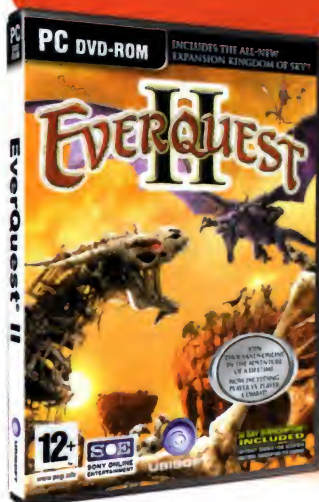
*EverQuest II: Kingdom Of Sky* up for the proverbial grabs and all you have to do to win is tell us your most eagerly-awaited PC game and answer this question:

Which of the following would you generally *not* find in the sky?

- (a) Cumulonimbus
- (b) Sandwichstratus
- (c) Nimbostratus

Send your entry on a postcard or the back of an envelope to *Kingdom Of Sky* Competition, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. The closing date is April 26. Any entries received after that will be taped together to form a sort of Entry Golem which we'll send round your house to smash up your stuff. And for the love of god, one entry per person – don't think we won't notice!

# WIN!



KINGDOM Of Pie (in the sky).



I remember this when it was all fields.



DRAGON-slaying's harder since they started using swords.



## SNIPPETS

**PATH Of Vengeance** is one of the institute's recent successes.

CALL Fireman Sam.

"PILLAR, pillar on the floor, who is the fairest of them all?"



### FREE PLANETSIDE

PlanetSide is offering free trial versions of its massively multiplayer online FPS. Seven-day trials? 30 days? Try 365. Yep, you can now play PlanetSide for a whole year before subscribing, with a few necessary limitations on available weapons and commands. Yay! [planetside.station.sony.com](http://planetside.station.sony.com)



### CHAOS THEORY MAP

Just when you thought Sam Fisher could hang up his goggles and take a well-deserved vacation, perhaps work on his tan a bit and write some memoirs of his travels, Ubisoft releases an official map which sees the plucky spy jetting off to the polar ice caps. No chance of topping up the tan then. [www.gamershell.com/download\\_12116.shtml](http://www.gamershell.com/download_12116.shtml)

## Bug-Fix of the Month

### THIS MONTH SAILORS OF THE SKY GOLD



Retail patch v5.4 "fixes a floating tree bug". Good thing too.

# BACK TO SCHOOL

**ZONE** speaks to a man who plays games academically for a living

**PC ZONE:** Can you explain what you do?

**PAUL NEWELL:** I'm the academic director for Game Art & Design and Visual & Game Programming at the Art Institute of Vancouver. Though in a nutshell, I'm a gamer - I have been ever since I first played *Pong* on a TV set in the 1970s.

**PCZ:** What games or mods have come from the Institute?

**PN:** The students at the school have produced 17 *Unreal Tournament* mods, one Source engine mod and three completely original titles since the game program began. In addition to these class projects, we have also done original work for a local children's hospice and are just completing a Flash-based game to be used as an educational game for local elementary school children.

**PCZ:** Do you think modding is helped or hindered by the lack of official marketing, commercial deadlines and big development teams?

**PN:** Given the absolute dearth of originality in some commercially established games, it's fair to say that marketing can be disconnected from what makes a game fun or viable. Mod communities are vibrant; look no further than the Independent Game Festival and recent critical acclaim for titles like *Katamari Damacy* and *Psychonauts* as indications of how important it is to have sound ideas and the fun factor in a game.

**PCZ:** Have your students gone on to work with any big developers?

**PN:** Students come into this program because they love games and want to be a part of the industry that makes them.

We've placed students with many companies across Canada, both large and small, including EA, Ubisoft, Rockstar, Radical, Backbone, Next Level Games, Threewave, Jarhead, IUGO, Nokia and many others.

**PCZ:** What do you think of schemes like the Make Something Unreal competition?

**PN:** These schemes are vital to creating vibrant mod communities. Here at the school, these competitions allow our students to compare their work with professionals, win prizes that further help their careers as well as provide the school with new equipment. The opportunities offered to students to enhance their educational experience are endless when we receive support and encouragement from the games industry.

## Movie of the Month NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

Wow, Obsidian is really piling on the survival horror atmosphere with its new *Neverwinter Nights 2* movie. These are the bits that scared the crap out of us. Well, out of Steve.

ARGH! A spider! Looks a bit like a Skulltula actually, from *Zelda*. Still scary though.

ARGH! Corpse-man in a helmet! One eye bigger than the other! Hah, that's actually quite funny.

ARGH! Winged demon! Or is it a gargoye? Gargoye demon? Demon gargoye?

ARGH! A dragon! Big wings, breathing fire and with halitosis! Eek!





'REBEL Scum On Abstract Plane!' said the *Hackney Gazette*.

## FEEL THE FORCE

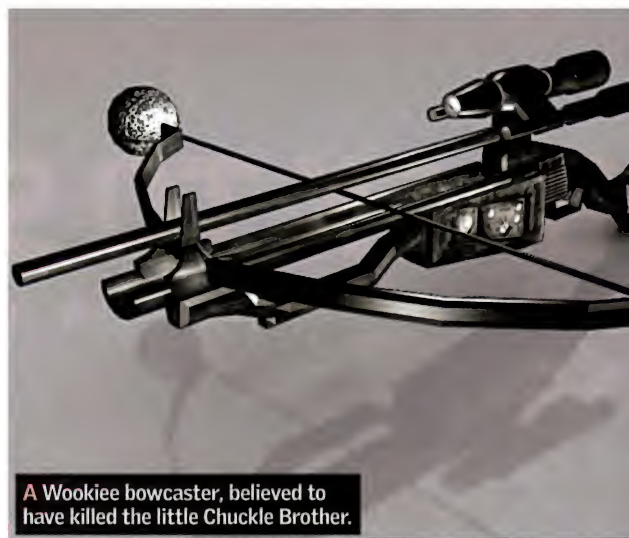
**BF2: First Strike** flies into view [firststrike.totalbf2.com](http://firststrike.totalbf2.com)

**THE CHARACTERS AND** mythology of *Star Wars* have survived three (or four) well-planned, meticulously executed and hugely profitable attacks on their credibility. It's a testimony to the forgiving nature of humans that we can forget the last seven (or 23) years, wipe the glittery shit from our dreams and just carry on.

The developer of *Battlefield 2: First Strike* is definitely the forgiving type, and has modded the vehicle-heavy, multiplayer world of *Battlefield 2* to occupy that faraway galaxy at

the time between *Revenge* and *New Hope*. The Jedi are gone and the Empire has crashed the bike of democracy – badly grazing the knees of freedom. Fortunately, the Rebellion has just started to, erm, coagulate.

Choose your side – you'll be able to take part in famous *Star Wars* battles, some of which will be taking place in space. And like Will's aunt constantly screams, space battles are ace battles. Visit the website for updates and to meet the team, and do a gawp-ogle at the concept art and models.



A Wookiee bowcaster, believed to have killed the little Chuckle Brother.



"BUGGER, the toilet's broken again."



BANG. And it's a big one.

## DARKEST BEFORE DAWN

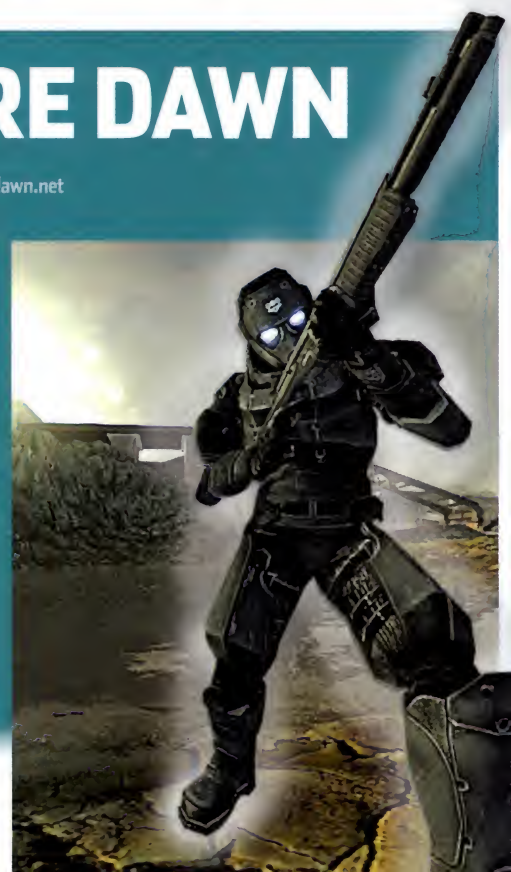
**Nuclear Dawn** falls out of bed [www.nuclear-dawn.net](http://www.nuclear-dawn.net)

**WE'VE DISCOVERED** a mod sexier than Charlize Theron wearing dungarees – *Nuclear Dawn*, the *Half-Life 2* mod of your dreams. Maybe it's the exciting game modes or the stunning graphics that put most commercial games to shame, but from the moment it wandered into our gaze, we've been head-over-heels in love with it.

Equally as impressive as the artwork are the levels of depth and craftsmanship present in the story, and the design of *Nuclear Dawn's* multiplayer battles. Set against the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic war, the mod is a

mish-mash of FPS and RTS conventions. As a commander, your team is relying on you to guide them to resources and throw down cheeky turrets and mines. As a soldier you can either hide in the shadows like a sneaky super-spy, or run in guns-blazing with a flashy suit of armour that makes you look a like an angsty Stormtrooper.

*Nuclear Dawn's* ambitious design plan has us really excited to see how the mod turns out. If the team behind it are as talented in game design as they are in the art department, we could be in store for something very special indeed.





# LIFE'S A BREACH

Say hull-o to stellar *HL2* mod *Hull Breach*

[www.hull-breach.com](http://www.hull-breach.com)

A LOT OF people play games as a means of escapism – if you live in a caravan and have a face like a potato, a super-charged Alienware is the perfect way of avoiding the drudgery of life. But there is another breed of gamer that while not resembling vegetables, plays games seeking the ultimate simulation. If the reload animation on their virtual rifle isn't correct down to the smallest physical quirk, they'll throw the game aside like a smelly wet towel.

*Hull Breach* is a *Half-Life 2* mod for both types of gamer – it's set in space so

that unwashed travelling people can escape from the real world and obsessive realist-types can marvel at the large variety of prone positions. *Hull Breach* takes a unique approach to the sci-fi shooter in that the weapons and environments in the mod are as realistic as possible; the guns have notches and crevices we didn't even know existed.

If you enjoyed our developer chat from issue 165, you'll be pleased to know that *Hull Breach* is fast approaching its first release and visor-switching shenanigans will soon be upon us.



## SO, YOU WANT TO BE A... SPECIAL APPS DEV

NAME Michael Baumgardt  
JOB TITLE Specialist application developer  
WORKING ON *X3: Reunion*  
AGE 21  
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE A life-long love of computers & software development

**PCZ** How did you get started?

**MB** My father got a computer to write letters, and it didn't take long until I knew more about the machine than he did. Then I made a good impression on the Egosoft forum and got an apprenticeship, and that's where I am now.

**PCZ** What's the pay like?

**MB** Well, within my own profession I'm getting more than many, less than some...

**PCZ** What does your job involve?

**MB** A lot of things. This is what makes this job so interesting. I can show my abilities and that benefits myself and the project.

**PCZ** How rewarding is your job?

**DE** When I see people who say that they liked this or that about the game – and I think 'I programmed that' – it's very rewarding and gives a nice little boost for my ego. Of course, there are times shortly before the deadline of a project when everyone is working extremely hard and under great pressure.

**PCZ** What's the most annoying part of the job?

**MB** That you can't please everyone and that the job's never done. It's an impossible task to make the perfect game (we keep trying, though). There will always be something to improve upon.

## WE SAY... DIY

You want to be a special whatsits developer eh? Well, get ready to program everything from company websites to game mission packs, AI routines and the office coffee machine. A games course is a good place to start – check out issue 165's special report for more.

## SET PIECE

Build your own backdrops with *The Movies Editor*

[www.themovieseditor.com](http://www.themovieseditor.com)

EVERYONE loves *The Movies*, but it was sometimes hard work to transfer your ideas to film – there wasn't enough stuff for you to get your hands on in the game. Luckily, two guys called Derobrush and Mark are working on *The Movies Editor*, which allows you to import custom models. Should you be a dab hand in a 3D modelling

program, and with a bit of time, love and skill, you can create and import your own favourite props and sets, from the cyborg hand in *Terminator 2* to the lobby setting made famous by *The Matrix*.



OF course we understand.



## BUG HUNT

*ST: The First Interstellar War* is incoming...

[www.sstisw.com](http://www.sstisw.com)

THE ORIGINAL *Starship Troopers* film was a ZONE favourite, full of brilliant set-pieces and tongue-in-cheek action. But our memories have been tainted by the astonishingly awful sequel and more recently by the official game.

So we've got high hopes for *Starship Troopers: The First Interstellar War*. As an RTS mod for *Star Wars*:

*Empire At War*, you'd expect them to have a lot of work ahead of them, but these busy modders have already been at work for over a year now. Promised features include the ability to play as one of three races (the Mobile Infantry, the Arachnids or the neutral Skinnies), ground wars and space battles, new units and battlefields ranging from Klendathu to Earth.



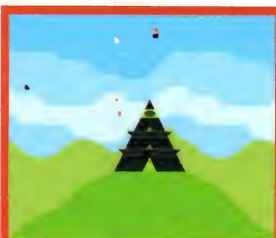


# Freeware



**Steve Hogarty** wants to give you something for nothing

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes, webgames or emulation. This month we realise we're all murderous scum, plus planet-defending penguins, jumping stickmen, schoolboys and Sefton's cousin.



## FLAP FLAPFLAP

Keep on flappin'

Developer: Larkley  
[www.the-underdogs.org/game.php?id=4342](http://www.the-underdogs.org/game.php?id=4342)

*FlapFlapFlap*, as well as being a great name, is a side-scrolling shoot 'em up in which you, a flying penguin thing, traverse the dangerous skies, hunting and destroying pyramids in an attempt to save the planet. Flight is achieved by hammering the up key to flap your wings (giving the game its title), while you shoot lasers from your beak and drop bombs from another unknown orifice. It controls a bit like *Lander*, with floaty physics and 360-degree movement being key to coming out on top. The simple graphics and retro sound effects are pleasing too, along with the little flapping noise the bird makes.



## I'M OK

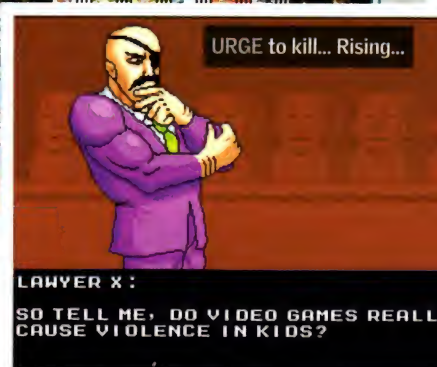
Honestly, I'm fine

Developer: Thompsonsoft | [imokgame.com/](http://imokgame.com/)



**WE ALL REMEMBER** the first time we, collectively, as gamers, killed somebody in a game-fuelled rage. Personally, I brutally savaged a man in the street with a club I'd fashioned out of a rock and a stick after losing a game of *Counter-Strike*. It's OK though: he was homeless and a road-sweeper drove over him the next morning, clearing away any evidence.

The point, however, is that games are bad. Games are as bad as disease, war, famine, bad



parenting and more diseases all rolled up into one big ball of badness. So bad are these games that only one man can possibly save us now – Jack Thomson, attorney-at-law, protector of all that is true and free and good and American, and inventor of *I'm OK*.

*I'm OK* is a side-scrolling shooter in which you must cross the United States in a murderous rampage, killing women, children, dogs and sometimes even men, before urinating on their severed brains stems in timely fashion. Some levels see you sniping customers of stores such as 'Beast Buy', while others see you shooting lawyers in the gut until they vomit blood and keel over. Lovely.

All sarcasm aside, if you ignore the extremely offensive subject matter, *I'm OK* is actually a fantastic little game, with brilliantly old-school SNES-style graphics and a great soundtrack. The game was created almost exactly to the insane lawyer's specifications, meaning all sorts of weapons are on show, from machetes and baseball bats to rocket launchers and shotguns. Even the scene in which you must piss all over the remains of Paula Eibel, CEO of Take This, has been included in worryingly hilarious detail. Be quick though, and have a go before Thomson's tendrils of Ultimate Law Power™ destroy the very webspace the game lives on.



# SEIKLUS

Don't try to pronounce it, just play

Developer: Clysml [www.autofish.net/clysm/games/seiklus/](http://www.autofish.net/clysm/games/seiklus/)

**ON THE OFF** chance that you don't happen to speak Estonian, 'seiklus' means 'adventure'. And on the off chance that you're not that good at English either, an adventure is an undertaking or enterprise of a hazardous nature (which isn't as catchy as seiklus really).

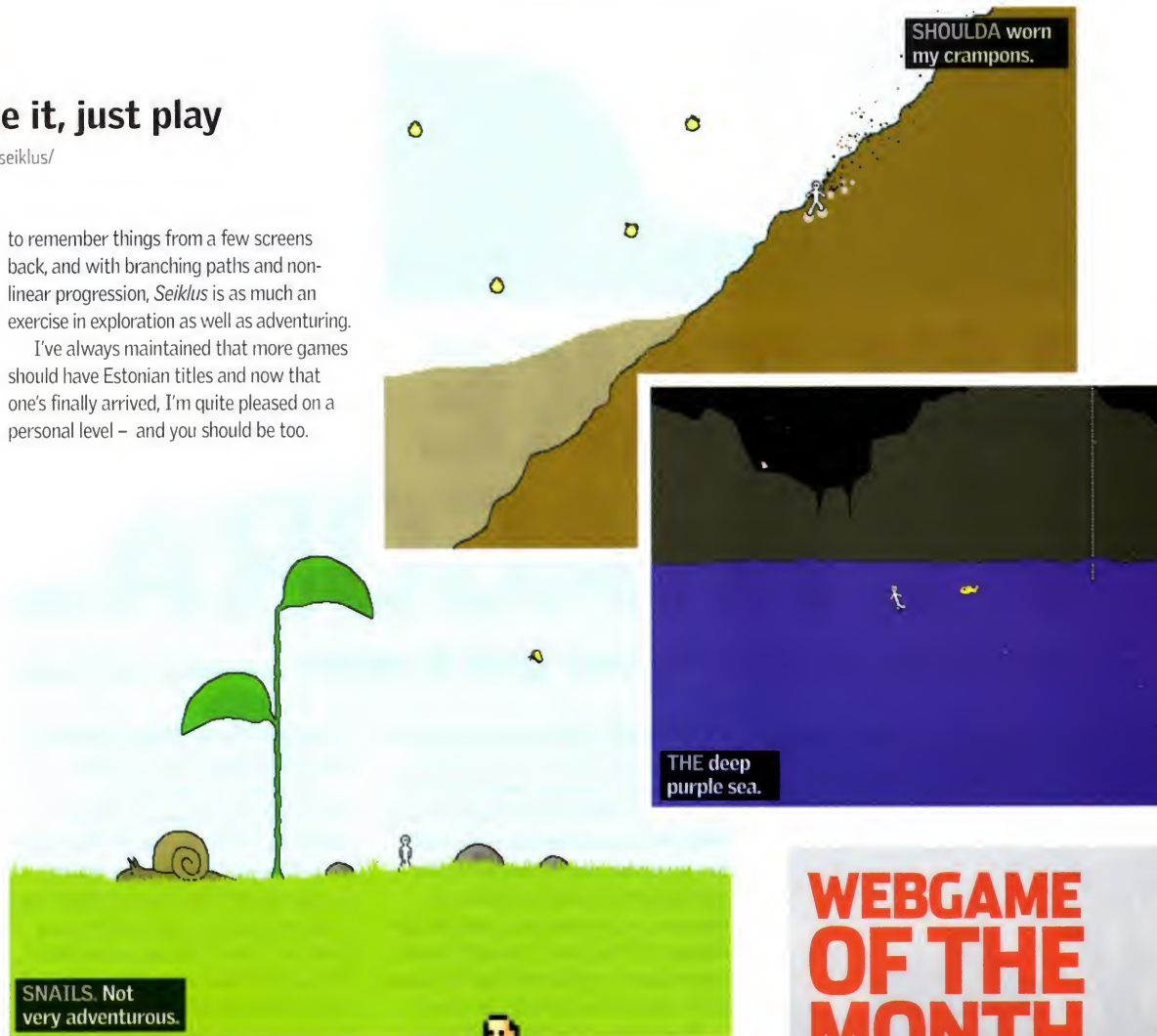
Not bucking this month's Freeware trend of having bright, retro-style graphics, *Seiklus* is a side-scrolling platform adventure-puzzler in which you, a little white stickman, embark on an undertaking of a hazardous nature through various vibrant and brilliantly-styled environments.

I'm a big fan of game music, I'll even admit to having the *Bubble Bobble* theme on my MP3 player, and although the creator of the game had no involvement in creating *Seiklus*'s music (instead using the work of some of his favourite chip music artists), it's simply some of the best you'll come across in any game, free or otherwise.

To be honest, the gameplay itself isn't as special as the visuals and audio surrounding it, with a few interesting if perhaps overly-obscure puzzles along with basic, sometimes irritating platform sections. Thing is though, when everything looks and sounds this nice, you'll just keep playing anyway. Puzzles are very much clue-centric, often requiring you

to remember things from a few screens back, and with branching paths and non-linear progression, *Seiklus* is as much an exercise in exploration as well as adventuring.

I've always maintained that more games should have Estonian titles and now that one's finally arrived, I'm quite pleased on a personal level – and you should be too.



# KLASS OF 99

Developer: Richard Jordan | [retrospec.sgn.net/users/rjordan/klask/](http://retrospec.sgn.net/users/rjordan/klask/)

Please Sir, I cannot tell a lie...

## IT'S A COMMON

misconception that things were better in the olden days. Grass was a better shade of green, you could get a tin of soda pop for half a penny and cabbages were bigger, about the size of a small dog or indeed a large cat.

The past isn't all lies and senile exaggerations though. For example, if somebody told you that *Skoal Daze* on the ZX Spectrum is a fantastic and unique game the like of which hasn't been seen since, they'd be right. They'd be wrong about the cabbages though.

*Klass Of 99* is a remake of the 1985 classic school simulator. The aim is to retrieve your school report from the

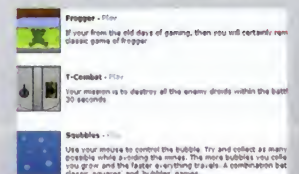
headmaster's safe, but at the same time you must go about your regular schoolboy activities such as going to assembly, attending class, beating up kids who're smaller than you, firing a catapult at a teacher and blaming somebody else, writing rude words on the blackboard, that sort of

thing. Not only that, you can assault the headmaster and be expelled, proving that not much has changed at all since *Grange Hill* times.



# WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

Daniel Sefton



**Dev: Daniel Sefton**  
**Web: [www.danielsefton.com](http://www.danielsefton.com)**  
 Daniel Sefton, just to clear up any confusion, isn't a webgame himself. But where have I heard that name before? Sefton, Sefton. Oh that's right, Daniel Sefton has the same surname as *PC ZONE* editor Jamie Sefton, who coincidentally recommended I mention Daniel Sefton's webgames in *PC ZONE*'s Webgame Of The Month bit! Not only does he share the Sefton name, he shares the Sefton blood – Daniel Sefton is Jamie Sefton's 14-year-old cousin.

Much like Tarzan or George Of The Jungle though, young Daniel is believed to have been abandoned at birth, and subsequently found and raised by a pack of roaming Seftons somewhere in the north of England. As such, he has the talents and skills of a real person, as shown in his website's various simple yet addictive flash games. Seems there's hope for the Sefton clan yet.



FREEPLAYPLAY!



MUST be Thriller night.



SEVEN. Seven mutilated zombie corpses.

# MISTAKE OF PYTHAGORAS



Steve Hogarty was never very good at maths [www.2d.biglobe.ne.jp/~ks\\_wca/mop](http://www.2d.biglobe.ne.jp/~ks_wca/mop)



THAT'S a Claude Nicolas Ledoux if ever I saw one.

**PYTHAGORAS, TO ME**, was that guy who figured out that right-angled triangles have imaginary squares coming off of the sides of them, which added themselves up while we weren't looking to make some sort of number which is relevant to the existence of the universe. He was not, however, a man who made a mistake (the mistake of Pythagoras, if you will), which caused some very bizarre things to happen in the similarly named *Half-Life 2* mod.

The storyline of *Mistake Of Pythagoras* is vague, a bit like describing World War II as a bit of trouble, or Charles Manson as a bit of a quirky fellow – that's the kind of vagueness we're trying to convey here. You're Gordon Freeman, only this time you're living in some alternate reality in which

dimensional rifts are randomly appearing and giant numbers fall from the sky.

It's surreal, like some sort of Pythagorean wet dream, and without wanting to ruin the surprise for you, it's got some of the most bizarrely constructed enemies the *Half-Life* universe has ever seen. It uses entities from *Half-Life 2*, meaning there are no new characters or new bits of dialogue, but the developer has cleverly circumvented this by simply re-arranging the dialogue from the main game. Alright, so it doesn't make much sense and you probably won't have a clue what's going on, but it at least tries to thread some sort of storyline together.

There's also a great section where a combine soldier throws you a gun to help

fight off an incoming zombie horde, and the moment when you manage to retrieve your gravity gun makes the whole puzzle sequence leading up to it a rewarding endeavour. It's also got some strange references to obscure architects such as long-dead Frenchman Claude Nicolas Ledoux, who designed odd-looking houses, as well as some great little set-pieces and puzzles, but for the most part it's *Half-Life*'s timeless gameplay mixed with the sort of bizarreness you only get in *Bizarro World*.

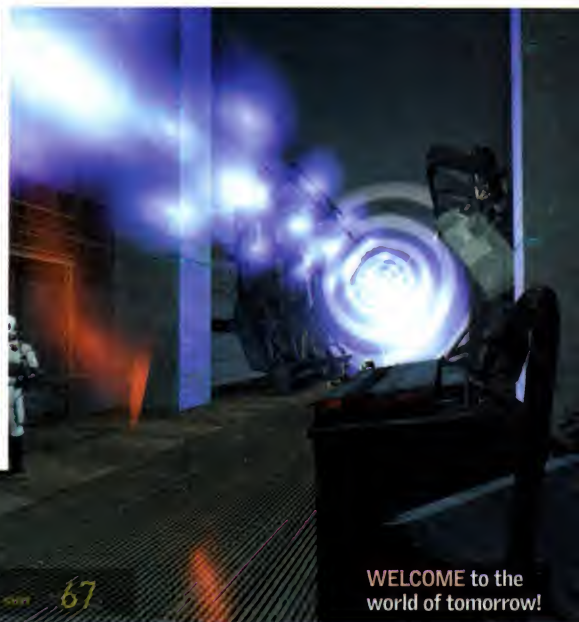
It's not the most off-the-wall mod we've come across, nor does it change the gist of *Half-Life 2* significantly, but those giant numbers everywhere remind us of an episode of *Sesame Street* gone wrong. And that makes us uneasy.



NICE brickwork.



FIVE is actually the loneliest number since the number one.



WELCOME to the world of tomorrow!



# CS: SOURCE VIP



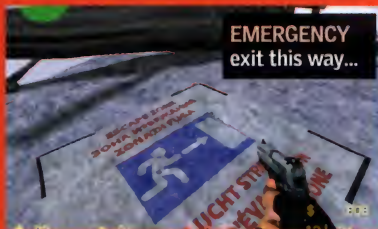
Look after me, I'm genuinely special, pleads *Jon Blyth* [vipmod.punkassfraggers.com](http://vipmod.punkassfraggers.com)

**EVERY NOW AND** then, the *Counter-Strike* terrorists and counter-terrorists stop fighting and have a coffee evening. They talk of many things – the queues at Argos, at what tilt a balaclava goes from rakish to camp – but mostly, they get misty-peeped about assassination mode, a gameplay style that was lost in the transition to *CS: Source*.

What it was, right; the game elected one player among the counter-terrorists to be the VIP. It was their job to get him, with his flimsy little pistol and some armour, to the rescue point. And all the terrorists had to do

was murder him. It all makes for an exciting game of teamwork and ambushes and forces tactics on even the dumbest player – as VIP, my wild, flailing runs for the safety zone were rightfully and repetitively met with a volley of hot bullets to the chops.

It was such a noted loss, that L.Duke did a mod of it. Made with the full co-operation of Valve, there are also some familiar maps designed to take advantage of the play style. If you're nostalgic, curious, or just want to take a bullet for someone who's crapping into his satchel underneath a table, play this.



## PCZONE TOP 5 WAR MODS



**1 DESERT COMBAT**  
Way back before *BF2*, we all played *BF1942: Desert Combat* for our modern-day combat kicks.

**2 RED ORCHESTRA**  
Before being re-released on Steam, the fantastic Ruskie shooter was a hugely successful *UT* mod.

**3 STAR WARS: GALACTIC CONQUEST**  
Arguably better than the official *SW: Battlefront* game, *GC* turned *BF1942* to the dark side.

**4 DAY OF DEFEAT**  
The original version of this *Half-Life* mod was a tough one online, but we loved it a whole lot.

**5 ROME: TOTAL REALISM**  
Adding loads of units and bloody blood, this realism mod transformed *Rome: Total War*.

## GOLDENEYE DOOM II

Steve Hogarty's the man with the gold-plated gun [goldeneye.newdoom.com](http://goldeneye.newdoom.com)

**THIS IS SPECIAL.** This is oddly special. Imagine deciding one day to port N64 classic *GoldenEye* to another engine, well you'd go Source surely. Everybody goes for the Source engine – the *GoldenEye: Source* guys went for the Source engine.

What if however, for some reason, you wanted to port it to an engine four years its elder? Well, this is what you'd get, a *GoldenEye* mod for *Doom II*. The weapons are there, the maps are there, almost everything is as you remember. Except it's in the *Doom II* engine. Hmm...

At first it's a novelty, but then it becomes a great little game in its own right, exhibiting both the coolness of *GoldenEye* and the blasting goodness of *Doom* simultaneously, something once believed impossible by scientists. Granted, it might take a bit of jiggery-pokery to get running, especially since the mod's website clearly doesn't receive enough attention from the mod-maker himself, but it's well worth it, if only to hear that great *James Bond* tune again. Down with Source, long live the *Doom* engine!





# FREEPLAYPLAY!

## DODGEBALL



Suzy Wallace learns to dodge, duck, dip, dive and dodge

[www.dodgeball-mod.com](http://www.dodgeball-mod.com)



**BEFORE 2004** AND the film of the same name, the chances are that 99 per cent of people in the world would have stared at you with blank expressions if you'd have mentioned the sport of dodgeball. But now the ridiculously simple-ruled game has been brought to the attention of the world via a group of astute modders, who've made the

most of the sport's recent publicity by porting it to *Half-Life 2*.

Of course, the Source engine's physics are ideally suited for the game, in which you knock out opposing team members by hitting them with a ball. But plain old dodgeball just wouldn't be enough. Nope, the Source engine has allowed for all kinds of *HL2* touches to be added, from exploding barrels to

balls that burst into flames upon contact with people (try aiming for the most nervous player and he might just take out the whole team while running about trying to put out the flames).

Adding more fun to the mod are the cool pitches you play on, which range from a school gym to skyscraper roofs – one level even features moving *Tetris*-style blocks. But while the mod is great and simple fun to play, it's let down by some irritating bugs such as opposition players often appearing to be carrying balls when in fact they're not, and the bane of all mods, empty servers. Balls to that then.



## THIEVERY UT

Stealing the sun from our hearts

[www.thieveryut.com](http://www.thieveryut.com)

**MANIC STREET PREACHERS** reference there, did you see it? It's fitting, because *Thievery for Unreal Tournament* did steal the metaphorical sun from our metaphorical hearts, with its complete reworking of everything we thought we knew about *UT*. With its genius thieves vs guards gameplay which worked either online or off with some impressive AI, the mod had you creeping around one of 11 original maps fulfilling objectives and, well, thieving. Melee weapons, bows and crossbows, fantastic collision detection and excellent combat, this mod had nigh-on everything you'd expect from a multiplayer version of *Thief*. We want an updated version, we really do, but for now we're happy enough with the original, and we just wanted to remind you.



## ZOMBIE STRIKE: SOURCE

Steve Hogarty introduces his boomstick

[idest.al.truz-net.se](http://idest.al.truz-net.se)



**ZOMBIES COME IN** a few flavours – the shambling, rotting sort, the infected yet still mobile sort, and prawn cocktail. There's one sort of zombie that isn't as widely known though, and that's the one that looks like an emotionless, unreasoning *Counter-Strike: Source* bot, holding a knife and walking towards you with that creepy AI stare. Now imagine 20 of those zombies hunting you and your LAN buddy down in *cs\_office*, knives at the ready.

It's actually *very* creepy, especially not knowing where they've all wandered off to as you make your way around whatever *Counter-Strike* map you've chosen. You just know they're out there somewhere, looking for you, probably making jokes to their zombie mates. Then it all descends into glorious, visceral glee as they relentlessly stream around a corner only to be torn apart by the business end of your 12-gauge shotgun. Get three people together on a server, fill the slots with zombie bots, chuck in a bit of imagination and *Zombie Strike: Source* becomes a hugely enjoyable and slightly unnerving experience.



# WIN A BEAST OF A GAMING PC!

Want to get your hands on a shiny new Dell XPS gaming PC? Then make an FPS!

IF PCS WERE animals, your average PC would be a wildebeest, gently grazing on the Serengeti as a setting sun bathes the entire scene in a red glow. The Dell XPS 600 coupled with an NVIDIA GeForce 7800 graphics card on the other hand would be a lightning-quick predator, a greased-up cheetah running down one of those moving walkways at the airport terminals, eating up lesser PCs and disobeying a few laws of physics. And thanks to the savannah-prowling hunters at NVIDIA and The Game Creators, we've managed to bag both of them for our exciting new competition. Pair these two bits of technology together and you have a machine capable of calculating the age of god – it really is that powerful.

So what do you have to do in order to see this behemoth ending up on your doorstep? Well, we want you to use the recently reviewed *FPS Creator* (issue 163, 53%) to create an FPS for us. You see, you'll find a 30-day trial version on the DVD or at [www.fpscreator.com](http://www.fpscreator.com) – and although you can't build standalone .exes with it, it's pretty much a fully functioning and noob-friendly game creator. It's easy to drag and drop lights, doors, space Nazis and the like – so get imagineering! As long as you follow the rules listed on the right, you'll be in with a chance of winning.



- Entries must consist of a single level of a first-person shooter built in *FPS Creator*.
- Entries must take around five minutes to play and complete.
- Entries must not contain copyrighted material or particularly offensive content.
- Entries must be sent directly to PC ZONE at the usual address on a single CD or DVD (no emails, USB dongle-jobbies, psychic transferrals or floppy discs).

Entries will be judged by an expert panel based on the following criteria:

- Design
- Playability
- Use of graphics and sound
- Fun-ness rating

As for content, well you're free to do what you like. Don't make it so rude that we can't have it on the shelves in WHSmiths though... Normal PC ZONE competition rules apply (see p9): closing date Wednesday May 24. Good luck!

## FIRST PRIZE:

- ★ A Dell XPS 600 worth over £1,000!
- ★ An NVIDIA GeForce 7800 graphics card
- ★ A shiny copy *FPS Creator*
- ★ Your game lovingly placed on the PC ZONE DVD!

## RUNNERS-UP:

- ★ Two lucky punters will win an NVIDIA GeForce 7800 graphics card and a copy of *FPS Creator*

## ZONE EXCLUSIVE OFFER

Buy *FPS Creator* and get 30% off the normal price...

There's a special offer running for 60 days over at the *FPS Creator* website. To take advantage of it, just visit [www.fpscreator.com/pczone.php](http://www.fpscreator.com/pczone.php) and tap in the code PCZONE2006-02-28 to get a massive 30% off the full £29.99 RRP of the game.



## SPACE ZOMBIES (IN SPACE): GOLD EDITION



Don't bother screaming, nobody can hear you...

He's done it again. You'd think the hype would've overpowered the release of *SZ(IS): Gold Edition*, but no. Steve Hogarty fed on the hype like a fat man slurping down sweet, sweet custard and churned out an amazing re-release of a fantastic game which Jon 'Log' Blyth describes as, "Steve Hogarty working at the height of his powers, an exquisite experience matched only by tonguing honey straight from the hive". You think you know *Space Zombies*?



Well you're wrong, D- in *Space Zombiology* for you. Play the game for absolutely nowt now – check out the DVD for more.



# Fight Club



First rule of fight club: stop moving and let us shoot you

COME AND  
TAKE ON THE  
ZONE STAFF IN  
OUR MONTHLY  
ONLINE GAMING  
FREE-FOR-ALL!

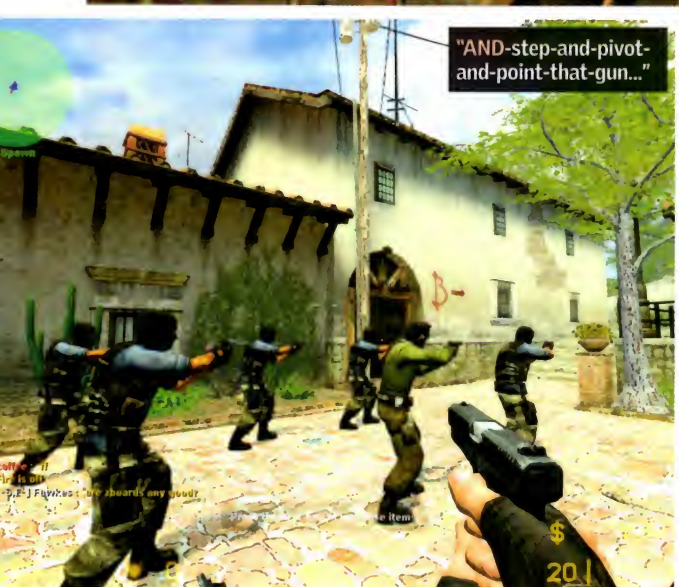
**WE SO ENJOYED** our relentless drubbing on *Counter-Strike: Source* last month, that we decided to re-enact it. And, like ghosts drawn to the scene of their stupid and violent deaths, most of the time was spent on the *cs\_militia* in an attempt to avenge our own murders that can only be described as 'proper shit'.

A lot of time was spent standing at the top of the tunnel, throwing down grenades and running away, in scenes that resembled a bunch of seven-year-old girls looking into an unflushed toilet. At one memorable point, Will was the last

man alive for the *PC ZONE* terrorists – and with three counter-terrorists cuddling the hostages in the house, he was our only hope. This state of last-hope heroics lasted until he met the enemy and they rapidly shot him in the teeth.

What's the game next month? It's *Counter-Strike: Source* again, kicking off on Tuesday, April 4 at 1800

hours prompt. If you're not there, then we can only assume that you're too busy kissing a picture of Jessica Fletcher, you dirty sleuth-lover...





## AND THE WINNER IS... Play to win every month!

EVERY MONTH IN Fight Club, we run two competitions to weed out the best tags and screenshots on the night. Win either, and we'll send you a prize. It could be one of Will's Wine Gums, it could be Will himself. We're that reckless when it comes to what we post to our readers.

The best screenshot award this month goes to LM9 (Ja DuTaH), who grabbed this image of a man doing a tiny dance (below). Soon after, we found this picture of a man named Trev with the word 'muppet' crudely emblazoned on his forehead – luckily it turned out to be Rollo Tomassi's tag in *Counter-Strike: Source*, so now we can show you. Both win a notorious PC ZONE goodie bag.

Send your amusing screenshots and tags to [fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk](mailto:fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk), with 'Fight Club Screenshot Compos' in the title.

### BEST TAG



### BEST SCREENSHOT



## ZONE CHAT



It's good to talk. And type.  
Tippety tappety lol...

READ  
THE FULL  
TRANSCRIPT AT  
[WWW.ZONEGAMES.CO.UK/](http://WWW.ZONEGAMES.CO.UK/)

**THIS MONTH'S ZONE** Chat took place on Hywel Bennett's birthday, so it's natural that a spirited sense of carnival pervaded the occasion. At one point, the overwhelming party atmosphere proved too much, and Steve had to leave his keyboard to do backflips.

Most words were spilt about the arrival of PCZ\_Log, and the united response of: "Who the hell's PCZ\_Log?" Unable to justify his own existence, Mr Porter kindly directed people to his blog ([blog.disappointment.com](http://blog.disappointment.com)). A cunning diversion that gave the hapless Log precious hours to come up with a witty reply. Conversation then turned inevitably to monkeys, in particular the fruity bonobo and their sexy handshakes. If you want to join in April's ZONE Chat, then it's on Monday, April 3, from 5-6pm. And Log's been told off for going off on one about primate semen, so you can bring the kids...

LOG: ZONE's new  
ginger plaything.



### How to join in!



If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

### Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps your flatmate's sending a long email to an ex, he's crying and you don't want to disturb him – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. ZONE staff might even be there. The latest information can always be found at [www.zonegames.co.uk](http://www.zonegames.co.uk).

### WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ\_NorthernScum  
Will Porter PCZ\_Batsphinx  
Suzy Wallace PCZ\_Uzibat  
Steve Hogarty PCZ\_escaped\_monkey  
Andy Robinson PCZ\_EssexHoodlum  
Phil Wand PCZ\_People's Front Of Judea  
Sam Kieldsen PCZ\_BoyWonda  
Jon Blyth PCZ\_Log

1 SWAT 4  
[swat4.zonegames.co.uk](http://swat4.zonegames.co.uk)

2 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE  
[cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015](http://cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015)  
[cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025](http://cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025)  
[cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015](http://cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015)

3 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH  
[hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065](http://hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065)

4 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE  
[dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085](http://dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085)

5 BATTLEFIELD 1942  
DC MODDED  
[dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567](http://dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567)

6 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC  
[tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045](http://tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045)

7 WOLFENSTEIN:  
ENEMY TERRITORY  
[et.zonegames.co.uk:27960](http://et.zonegames.co.uk:27960)

8 UNREAL  
TOURNAMENT 2004  
[ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777](http://ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777)  
[ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888](http://ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888)

9 CALL OF DUTY  
[cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960](http://cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960)

10 JOINT OPERATIONS:  
TYPHOON RISING  
Listed on NovaWorld



# THE FATE OF THE ENTIRE GALAXY IS IN YOUR HANDS

## THE FLEETS

Do you quickly build a fleet of TIE fighters and swarm the enemy before they gain strength? Or take time and build a more powerful fleet of Star Destroyers?

## THE ELEMENTS

Do you wait until after the ice storm and lose the element of surprise? Or do you take advantage of low visibility and attack when they least expect it?

## THE ARMIES

Do you crush bases under the feet of AT-ATs and risk losing a few? Or do you call down ships from space and bomb them back to the Stone Age?



Will you repeat *Star Wars*® history or change it forever? Play *Star Wars: Empire at War* and test your strategic mettle in an epic fight to control the entire *Star Wars* galaxy. As the Ultimate Galactic Commander, jump right into battle without wasting time on tedious resource gathering. Lead the Rebel Alliance in a quest to overthrow the Empire. Or choose the dark side, and use Darth Vader and the Death Star to crush the Rebellion. Either way, every soldier, battalion and fleet are yours to control. Make *Star Wars* history. Get your copy today. [www.empireatwar.com](http://www.empireatwar.com)

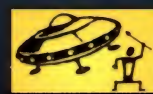


Game experience may change during online play.

PC  
DVD  
ROM



POWERED BY  
gamespy



LUCASARTS



# GALAXY IS IN YOUR HANDS. READY?

## THE WEAPON

Do you protect the Death Star and reveal it at a critical moment? Or do you break out your big gun first and use Rebel planets for target practice?

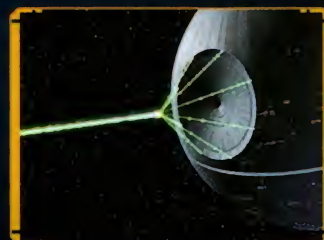
## THE CREATURES

Do you attack head-on and risk massive casualties? Or flank the enemy, circle around and hope any rancors you meet along the way aren't hungry?

## THE TROOPS

Do you use guerilla tactics, conserve resources and slowly pick off enemy forces? Or do you go for broke and overwhelm the enemy with a sea of troops?

# STAR WARS EMPIRE AT WAR





## Need:

A copy of *Civilization IV*  
A collection of  
humorously-named cities  
A life to sap

## What you'll get:

A renewed hatred of Julius Caesar ✓  
Competent defence and offence ✓  
Control of the mob ✓  
A monkey in a tree ✗

# Conquer the Earth in Civilization IV

"Just one more go," murmurs  
*Will Porter* to nobody in particular...

**D**ID YOU KNOW that the beautiful choral music that plays as you boot up *Civilization IV* is the Lord's Prayer being sung in Swahili? No? Then perhaps you don't love Sid Meier quite as much as you should. If you follow these helpful pointers, then maybe you'll be fit to lick his beautiful strategic boots. The many layers of *Civ* goodness mean that it's a tricky beast to provide tips for in a mere two pages – but these are the ways I've improved my game since reviewing Meier's masterpiece in issue 162. Remember though, whatever the diplomatic situation and whatever the trade negotiation – never trust the Romans.

## 01 Aim to win

My first and most important tip is to start and finish with one goal in mind. I've habitually played as a wishy-washy jack-of-all-trades in the past – trying to be all arty and cultured while at the same time dishing out death to my neighbours when I fancy it. In the long-term though, and within the limited time/turn span of each game, this doesn't quite work. If you're going for world domination, then choose an aggressive and expansive leader like Genghis Khan and then don't relent in the pursuit of gunpowder units and wonders like West Point or The Pentagon. If you're being peaceful, then it's culture all the way – plus defence, defence, defence. The single-minded will conquer the earth.

## 02 SCOUT'S HONOUR

Expansive races have a scout on their first turn – if you don't have one, then for god's sake research hunting and get one. As in every iteration of *Civ*, an exploratory group of be-speared rambles can come across all manner of native huts that can grant you immediate access to technology or even, joy of joys, a Settler – so make them travel far and wide. With Settlers, remember the all-important borders of cultural influence that will play such an important role later on – spread them out, but remember the opposition's habit of building smack in the middle of what you consider as home turf.

## 03 Be selfish

It always used to be my habit to take pity on a rival nation in terms of technology trading – particularly if they're a bit crap or have a female leader with big pleading eyes. But no! Only trade to your advantage; if you're being kind, then give them cows or bananas or something... If you're throwing technology around willy-nilly, then you're giving away a vital edge – particularly if the other nation has aims similar to yours or are on your hitlist. Beware deals that are ferociously one-sided and negotiate until you're blue in the virtual face.





## 04 First offence is in...

Defence! Right then, ever since WillIsStillCool was stolen in broad daylight (in the middle of my continent and completely undefended) by the bastard Romans, I've been upping my defence quota no end. Archers are your main men here, hopefully with a 20 per cent defence bonus, aided and abetted by Pikemen and Axemen. Obvious stuff really, but things like Cavalry units really don't work in the city streets. Likewise: the research of Masonry and Engineering are musts for cultural and aggressive civilisations alike – walls and castles won't build themselves you know.



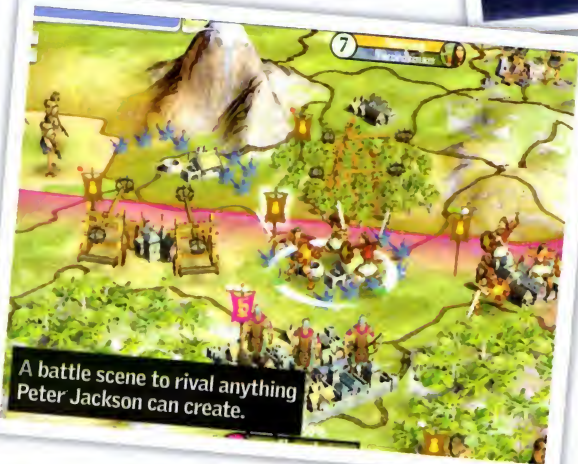
## 05 Culture Culture

You can nick someone else's burgeoning city through sheer cultural force. With a hugely influential city on your border, tooled up with a mega-cultural killer-app like the Globe Theatre, you can trigger a rebellion in a nearby rival city. Best of all, you won't even get in trouble for it! So if you have a Great Artist handy, nudge him over towards the border, tell him to build something nice and influence your neighbours for all you're worth.



## 06 I'm a believer

Culture and Violence aren't the only things you can bend your neighbours with – there's also religion. If you've been racing up the technology tree and have become the birthplace of a religion, then try and spread it throughout your lands – but don't forget the Egyptians/English next door. If a nearby country hasn't discovered or adopted a religion, then it's an idea to nudge them down the same godly route you've been down – missionaries to key foreign cities and open borders clearly being the way to go. A shared religion with a neighbour can grant you a powerful ally as well as trading partner – and an unsuspecting victim should you plan invasion.



## 08 ONE MORE TURN

The most important tip for Civ players everywhere is to remember to play in moderation. Prolonged exposure seriously harms you and others around you, and also harms your unborn child. If you can hear nothing but an echoing mantra of 'one more turn', then please get in contact with Civilization Anonymous at [www.civanon.org](http://www.civanon.org). There are people who can help you. **PCZ**



## 07 UNDER SIEGE

I used to just plough my forces into an enemy city one by one, hoping blind fate would see my final pair of warriors take out a deeply entrenched trio of riflemen. These are the tactics of a buffoon. Now, I start off by kicking shit out of the farms and settlements outside the city, and so earning a pretty penny while finding a defensible spot for my armies to kip in. I then draft in a unit or two to tend the wounded and begin the assault. Siege engines are your friend here – roll in the artillery and watch (well, imagine) walls crumble, then send in the troops. Victory shall be ours!





# FREE\* GAME for your mobile phone!

## YOU PLAY WE PAY!

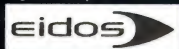
FREE MOBILE  
GAME BROUGHT  
TO YOU BY...  
**PCZONE**

We tested dozens of games and picked out three of the most enjoyable titles...

### TOMB RAIDER



Lara Croft and her iconic pair (of pistols) have discovered an exciting new world of adventure – on your mobile! This cracking action romp boasts 15 levels of ancient ruins for you to explore, each packed with death-dealing traps and fabulous treasures. The fluid platforming and satisfying controls prove this ain't no shallow bimbo – if you're up for a challenge, Lara's your girl!



### CANNON FODDER



If you like your action shot through with strategy, then *Cannon Fodder* is the game for you. Your aim is to guide a tiny band of brothers through more than 20 enemy-infested missions. But don't expect to just blast your way to victory – you need to use your brains to figure out how best to use the machine guns, grenades and bazookas at your disposal. War has never been so much fun!

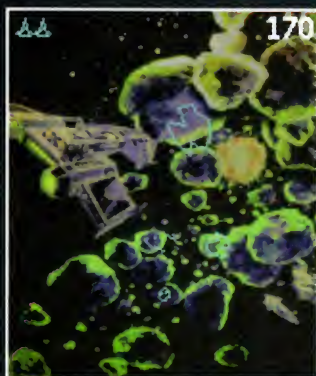


### ATARI LEGENDS



### VOLUME 3

Retro games can be a bit of a mixed bag, but you won't need to put on your rose-tinted specs here – this latest raid on Atari's vaults has produced a trio of cast-iron classics that are just as fun now as you remember them way back when. Pick and mix from either bat 'n' ball legend *Pong*, brick-bashing spectacular *Super Breakout* or the rock-blocking beats of *Asteroids Deluxe*. Groovy!



Just choose one of the 3 titles listed, then text **PCZONE** to **62344**. Check out the 'How It Works' panel for more information. It's easy!

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Usage of the PCZONE browser service is subject to GPRS coverage, handset capability and network availability. A full list of compatible handsets is published in the FAQ at [www.read4games.com](http://www.read4games.com). At peak times, SMS traffic may be subject to network delay. Your phone must be WAP enabled and able to run Java games. Once connected, the service will check product compatibility with your phone. If you need assistance on connection or other issues, text HELP to 62344. \*We do NOT charge you for the service, but usage requires a short WAP and/or data connection for which your operator may charge at your normal rate. Core Lara Croft and Tomb Raider are registered trademarks of Core Design Limited. Eidos and the Eidos logo are trademarks of Eidos Limited. All rights reserved. Cannon Fodder © 2004 The Codemasters Software Company Limited ("Codemasters"). All rights reserved. "Cannon Fodder" is a registered trademark of Sandale Limited. Used under license by Codemasters. "Codemasters" and the Codemasters logo are registered trademarks owned by Codemasters. "GENIUS AT PLAY"™ is a trademark of Codemasters. Atari Legends: Vol. 3 comprising Asteroids® Deluxe™, Super Breakout® and Pong® © 2006 Atari Interactive, Inc. All rights reserved. ASTEROIDS, SUPER BREAKOUT, PONG and ATARI word marks and logos are the trademarks or registered trademarks of Atari Interactive, Inc. or its affiliates in the US and other territories. Used with permission. Produced and published by iFone under license from Atari, Inc. By using the service, you agree to abide by the terms and conditions published therein and at [www.read4g.com](http://www.read4g.com). Offer expires 30th April 2006.





HOW TO...

# Make a game

PART NINE

**Dan Marshall** meets a man with a broken sword

**P**EOPLE HAVE BEEN looking at me very strangely today. Maybe it's because I've got a smirk on my face that makes me look a little like Magnum PI when he's been told that there's a 20-year-old wealthy heiress Olympic swimmer and/or supermodel staying at Robin Masters' estate, I don't know. Or maybe it's my *Psychonauts* T-shirt and home-made *Psychonauts* goggles that are causing looks of disdain among the otherwise cheery commuters of Olde London Towne...

Whatever the explanation, I have good reason to be grinning like a maniac. In my continuing attempts to hone *Gibbage* into some sort of legendary ultra-refined über-game, I've just received a glowing report of my playable demo from none other than Charles Cecil – head honcho of the *Broken Sword* series and legend in the games business. Frankly, I don't care if you thought there was too much crate-shoving in *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*. I really enjoyed it, and I'm brimming with anticipation for the recently announced fourth game. As such, I'm sure you'll appreciate just how gloriously ecstatic and nervous I was when my inbox made that familiar and oh-so-exciting 'buh-ding' sound.

## YOU GOT MAIL

Like most emails of the sort, I didn't really read it properly first. My eyes scanned the text, plucking out various adjectives to try and get a sense of whether his feedback was good or bad. About halfway down, I had to stop for a cup of tea – not only had Charles taken time out to play my humble little game, but his feedback made my eyes melt with glee.

"Firstly, I must say that this is a enormous achievement," he said. "My immediate impression was of a two-player *Chuckie Egg* on acid – but then realised that such comparisons really showed my age. The game is great fun; old-school and

contemporary, bursting with energy, bloody but in a cute way."

Frankly, to be compared to *Chuckie Egg* is something of a triumph on its own, but the praise just seemed to keep on coming: "It has a great scenario and a wild art style. As a single-player game it's hard – really hard. Because the AI

## Yes But When Can We Play It?

"It'll be done when it's done"

I'm trying my hardest to finish *Gibbage*, but between a full-time job, writing for *PC ZONE* and spending time with my girlfriend in order to remove that haunting 'when will I be rid of this silly computer game nonsense?' look from her face, it's proving tricky to say the least. The good news is that the gameplay mechanics and all 27 maps are in, finished and playing nicely. I just need to work on the front-end and remove all the bugs. The new release date? I'm taking on the big boys and putting it out against *STALKER* and *Duke Nukem Forever* (read: "I dunno").

opposition is incredibly, unreasonably, unfeasibly brilliant at killing me. But as a two-player game it's great fun – it captures the simple playability of games gone by. With incredibly simple rules, it's a classic platformer."

Did you read that OK? I'll repeat it in bold for you, in case you've got poorly eyes from locking yourselves in the bathroom 'enjoying' the latest set of *Tomb Raider: Legend* screenshots too much: "A CLASSIC PLATFORMER". This man makes his money creating computer games, and he's referring to *Gibbage* with phrases like that? Could it be that I'm some sort of prodigy, sent down by Peter 'God' Molyneux to revolutionise the broken games industry?

Er, frankly, no. "I felt that the gunfire was a bit too rapid – generally the first to shoot would win too quickly, but that's a small point. Another minor criticism is the default

keys – what's wrong with the old Q A O P that we have come to know and love? But these are very minor criticisms. Generally I was really impressed and look forward to the final version in all its glory."

To sum up, then, you can see why I've gone into smugness overdrive of late. If he likes the demo this much, wait till he gets his hands on the final version. I'm starting to think that, like a blind old drunk who accidentally falls down a man-hole into some sort of palace made of candy-floss and filled with free booze and scantily clad ladies, I've stumbled onto something quite special with *Gibbage*. I thought I was just throwing elements in left, right and centre. Things that I found fun and funny. But then, maybe *Gibbage* is just the gaming equivalent of *George's Marvellous Medicine*... **PC7**

RON Gilbert's request for a comic book-style intro comes true.

If you want more...

[www.thetriforce.com](http://www.thetriforce.com)

Charles' PR man's website. For when you want something funny to read at work, and UKResistance hasn't been updated in a while...

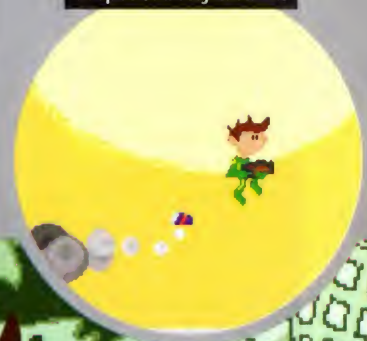
[www.gibbage.co.uk](http://www.gibbage.co.uk)

It's almost done! It may even be up by the time you read this! Uh, best not count on it, though...

[encomemusic.dmusic.com](http://encomemusic.dmusic.com)

My composer Mike Watts' music portfolio. He's got a kid on the way and I'm too tight to pay him. So go here and feed him compliments. He lives off them.

A spot of botty trouble.



CLOWNS: still scary.



LOOKS like there's a bug in the 'weather system' code.





# abandonware

Andy Robinson with the videogames that time (and publishers) forgot...

## What is abandonware?

Abandonware is computer software that's no longer being sold or supported by its copyright holder, such as the classic sci-fi RPG shooter *System Shock 2*. However, game copyright is protected by law for 70 years, so even though you can't buy these games, downloading them is technically illegal. *PC ZONE* doesn't condone filthy criminals. Or even ones that have had a good scrub.



ABANDONWARE  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH



# TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER



**WE OFTEN WONDER** what Acclaim was thinking when it came up with a game starring an American Indian, plasma rifles and cybernetically-enhanced dinosaurs. Any shooter in which you gun down robotic T-Rexes with an explosive bow and arrow is either absolute genius or

madder than the singing tramp who lives on the corner of my road. Thankfully, *Turok* is both genius and mad.

*Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* is a frantic prehistoric blaster with an arsenal of unique weapons, and also houses some of the most frustrating jump-puzzles in the history of gaming. We revisited the game to see if the jumping sections were as irritatingly difficult as we remember. Two broken keyboards and a police caution later, we've decided that some sections of *Turok* are best left to memory.

The game was originally conceived on the Nintendo 64, but like most first-person shooters worth mentioning, it

eventually made its way over to the PC in late 1997. The pixelated gore abundantly scattered around *Turok* may look tame by today's standards, but back in the late '90s it had *Daily Mail* housewives sprinting for their petition pens and some stores even refused to carry the game.

*Turok: Dinosaur Hunter's* unsullied, no-nonsense approach to Jurassic first-person shooting makes it highly regarded as the best game in the fledgling series, with later sequels sinking into a pit of depravity. It's not as technically thrilling as the original *Quake*, but we're just pleased to finally do some shooting outside of a space marine shell. **PCZ**



## If you want more...

[www.abandonia.com](http://www.abandonia.com)

Kosta Krauth's website is a treasure trove of abandonware goodness.

[www.the-underdogs.org](http://www.the-underdogs.org)

Underdogs is a podium for the unappreciated PC games of yesteryear.

[www.rockstargames.com/classics](http://www.rockstargames.com/classics)

Download *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2* for absolutely nowt.



Most notable for its licensed games in the 16-bit era, Acclaim created some of the most well-known franchises of the late '90s. *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* and *Shadow Man* were two of the company's most revered games, both gaining plaudits in the gaming press of the day. Acclaim had numerous studios scattered around the US and the UK housing over 400 employees, and also dabbled in comic-books and extensive motion-capture studios. However, even though the future looked bright, the shades were thrown aside when franchise sequels and critically-acclaimed hits like *Burnout* failed to sell. The company filed for bankruptcy in late 2004.





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# STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



**Steve Hill goes on the pull in *City Of Villains***

**W**E'RE LIVING IN the future. Having been emailed a virtual flyer for a virtual club, I send an Instant Message to my virtual friend (former *ZONE* staffer Mallo, aka the evil Fairground Worker), to see if he fancies going on the pull. A balding biker and a reject from Slipknot. What nubile young temptress could resist?

Honing in on the first woman I see – a pert hard-body with thigh-length boots and red skin – it turns out she's a hostess for the club, and while she's happy to make small talk, she won't be putting out. Meanwhile, Fairground has steamed straight onto the dance floor, where I join him and throw a few shapes. It's a decent venue with some pounding house beats, but it's nowhere near full, a mere smattering of heroes and villains occupying the vast warehouse structure. Crucially, it is, as Fairground sagely pronounces: "Light on birds."

Our dancing doesn't attract any females, but The Brutal Horn Butcher – a werewolf in ripped shorts – sidles up behind me and gives me the once-over. Slightly intimidated, I suggest: "Let's find some chicks," to Fairground, and go upstairs where DJ Zero is playing his set while levitating. You don't see Pete Tong doing that. The DJ

is being watched intently by a stunning blonde called Philtrum. Arms crossed moodily, her lithe body barely concealed by sporadic lingerie, the look is topped off with what's either a Zorro mask or two very severe black eyes. An opening gambit of: "Alright love?" doesn't cut any mustard and she continues staring into middle distance.

## BLACK IS BACK

Taking the hint, I spot the green-haired War Witch stood on a balcony and stroll over to give her some Evil Steve Hill charm. I'm about to lay on the patter when she announces apropos of nothing: "The sweet thing about alternate realities is that the dead always seem to come back to life." This puts me on the back foot somewhat, and I decide to adhere to the maxim, 'don't get involved with goths'.

Fairground, however, claims to have pulled, and that he has screenshots to prove it. Conveniently, by the time I locate him, the object of his desires has mysteriously disappeared. According to the shunned waltzer operator: "She had a dance with me, then gave me a peck on the cheek and f\*\*\*ed off." A likely story...

"You do the talking – I'll follow you," suggests my pulling partner. Taking a chance on the freakishly tall Shewhack, in

time-honoured fashion I enquire: "You dancing?" Taking the initiative, I perform a few star jumps, but she doesn't seem that impressed and promptly leaves the club.

"There's got to be someone up for it in here," I announce, and attempt to chat up a dancer, although my cause is somewhat hampered by her being in a cage.

## MASTER BLASTER

Turning my attentions to The Dynamic Blaster, I'm again getting nowhere and grumpily dismiss her as a time-waster. "I'm not a time-waster," she protests. "I just like to get to know people first." Seizing on this weakness, I ask her if she fancies a dance. "Why not?" she surprisingly replies, and starts gyrating while I wave my hands in the air like I just don't care.

"You look good on the dance floor," I tell her, and weakly compliment her nice trousers. She seems to be enjoying herself, but Fairground doesn't help my cause by butting in with: "My mate fancies you. And wants to have your babies. Evil babies." "Get lost," I tell him. "I'm in here."

The damage would appear to be done though, and she stops dancing, only to

announce: "1 on 1 is no fun." "What do you suggest?" I ask. "I'm very open-minded." But she's already leaving, and as she gets in the lift the last thing she hears is a bald man in yellow trousers screaming: "Don't go!"

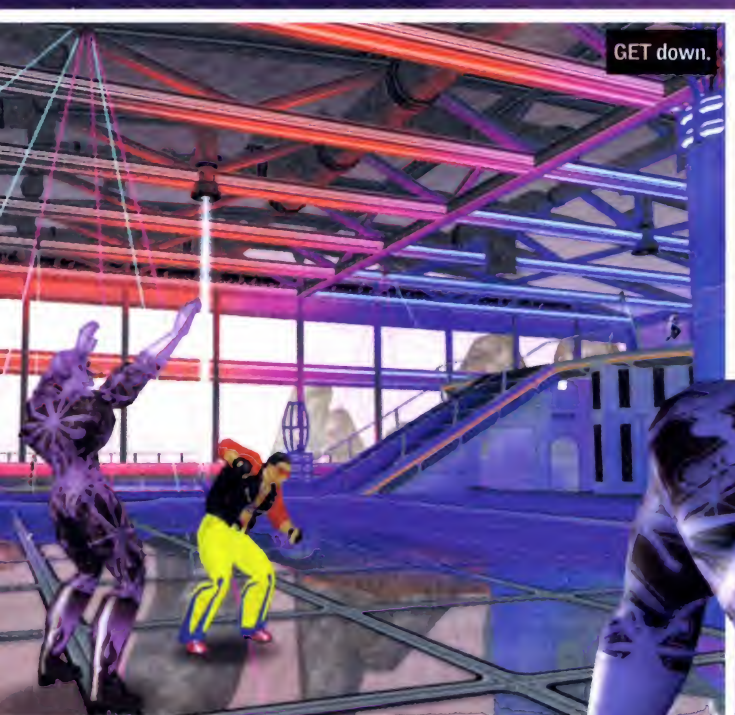
## LIKE A LORD

It's a blow, but arguably not as bad as that suffered by Fairground, who was simultaneously chatting up a long-haired sort, only to discover it was a bloke. As he says: "I narrowly avoided a battering."

Unperturbed, I stroll up to a snake-charmer called Thicke and introduce myself: "Hiya love. I can read your lips in those shorts." Amazingly, she leaves. Strike three.

Reconvening to the bar, it dawns we may have misjudged the situation. A camp-looking bloke called Chainclaw is nearby, and I ask him: "Are you gay?"

"Not as gay as a middle-aged balding man in a leather jacket smoking a cigar and talking to strangers while wearing yellow trousers," he doth protest. "It's just that we've had no luck with the birds," I hastily explain. Or as Fairground sighs: "No spitroast tonight." Just two bitter super-villains, crying into our beer. **PEZ**



**"You dancing?" I enquire, doing a few star jumps. She's not impressed**



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C&C: Renegade

C&C: Red Alert 2 +  
Yuri's Revenge

C&C: Generals - Zero Hour



**I**HAVE A confession to make; one of my all-time greatest guilty pleasures is buying a small army of *Red Alert* attack dogs, sticking on *The Ride Of The Valkyries* and going on a doggie killing spree. Never mind Special Forces teams – if the pooches enlisted in the British army were as lethal as the man-hunting German shepherds from *Red Alert*, then the world's bloody conflicts would be sorted in a matter of hours, to the fanfare of terrified screams and canine growling.

The truth is, I have ten years of childish habits stemming from this veteran series of RTS games, from demo-truck convoys to infinitely-stretching rows of tesla coils

– truly, the *Command & Conquer* series is a long stretch of gaming gold. But the question is, with RTS titans like *Supreme Commander* on the horizon, is the old genre champion worth another look?

### THE TEST OF TIME

Now that the series is under the stern gaze of EA Games, a money-raking C&C collaboration was only a matter of time. But if you're looking for anti-capitalist EA bashing, turn away now: 12 C&C games for £29.99, amazingly squeezed onto a single DVD? Sounds like an absolute steal to us.

Don't adjust your eyes – you read that correctly: *The Last Decade* wields 12

DEFINITELY quicker  
than the tube.







no moon!  
, it is...



"DAVE, you've got your  
helmet on backwards."



LADY Liberty got  
wrecked last night...

whole games from the *C&C* series, which was born way back in 1995 in Westwood Studio's then-garage headquarters. So that's all of the original *Tiberian* series games, all of the *Red Alerts*, the latest offering *Generals*, plus legions of expansions and even the red-headed step-child of the series, *Renegade* chucked in for only 30 notes. Suddenly, Asda's bargain counter isn't very impressive anymore.

## TO THE BONE

After spending an afternoon's light typing to get all the serial numbers in, I finally managed to claw my way in to the original *C&C*. The first obvious note is that the game's VGA graphics haven't quite stood the test of time, while *Red Alert*'s Soviets sound more like Avid Merriam these days than actual Russians. Having said that, the live-action cut-scenes and synthy soundtrack are, surprisingly, still impressive today, which is a notable feat for a game running at a resolution smaller than your average *Minesweeper* window.

Technical qualms aside, after a few afternoon skirmish sessions I was locked in a kind of nostalgic tractor beam – and there was no Obi-Wan Kenobi around to shut it off. *C&C*'s simple-natured approach to the genre seems to have greatly assisted its battle against the harsh ravages of time.

It's true that the more recent 3D series entries are looking a little dated too. Westwood's Las Vegas studio was bought out by EA in 1998, and with a shiny new EA Games logo donning its boxes, Westwood began pumping out a new breed of *C&C* games.

While the 'rock, paper, scissors' style of gameplay is still as effective as ever, our beefy gaming PC weeps at *Tiberian Sun*'s lacklustre selection of screen resolutions. *Red Alert 2*, meanwhile, is partly saved by some rather lusciously rendered buildings and scenery, its excellent array of unique sides and units making it one of our more favoured notches in Westwood's bed-post.

## 12 C&C games squeezed onto one DVD for this price? Sounds like a steal to us

After Westwood was closed by EA, and willing staff fed into EA Los Angeles, the more sterile series entry *C&C: Generals* emerged, which, while rough around the edges, does a good job of living up to the franchise name.

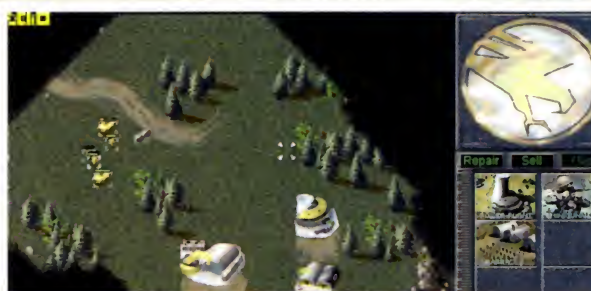
If you want *C&C*-style action these days, you'd be advised to wander in the direction of *Battle For Middle-Earth* or *Star*



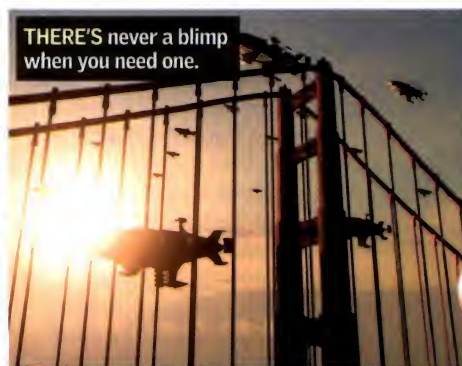
JUST look how  
rubbish this is.

## WE MADE THIS

Bonus DVD tells the story of *C&C*



There might be 12 *Command & Conquer* games in this box to wrap your head around, but why play those when you can watch some American geek labelled as the World's Greatest *C&C* Fan™ wallow in his own drool? That's right, *C&C: The Last Decade* comes bundled with a fabulous bonus DVD packed full of exciting developer movies and game trailers. We'll be honest: the movies on the disc are basically fancy PR, and the 60-second 'Future Of *C&C*' movie reveals absolutely nothing. Still, good effort...



THERE'S never a blimp  
when you need one.



THE space launch  
attracted a bad crowd.



OH my god! The  
sea's purple!

*Wars: Empire At War*, both of which have land battles of the *C&C* model and many ex-Westwood staff on board.

However, if you've got a taste for nostalgia, whether it's fighting for Mother Russia in *Red Alert* or battling Kane in *Tiberian Sun*, most of us have a soft spot for Westwood's strategy opus (except for *Renegade* – it's rubbish).

But herein lies the problem

– when you boot up *The First Decade*'s game selection menu, it's impossible to decide which game to play next, and often results in selection methods involving post-it notes and a dartboard. One day, I'll manage to get horribly bored of the *C&C* series. Until then, I'm off to build a base of tesla-guarded dog kennels. **PCZ**

## THE RAVAGES OF TIME

C&C RED ALERT 2 **1st**

C&C RED ALERT **2nd**

C&C: GENERALS **3rd**

In terms of the *C&C* games, the advances of technology have improved upon the once flawless template. The most recent series output *Generals* is a more than competent strategy game for the *C&C*-starved.



## SUPERTEST

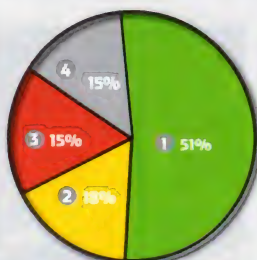
# THE BEST OF HALF-LIFE



This month the **ZONE** team put on their hazard suits and debate Gordon and friends

### YOUR VIEW

Last month's subject:  
Which game has the  
greatest ever level?



- HALF-LIFE: SURFACE TENSION **1st**
- FAR CRY: REBELLION **2nd**
- DUKE NUKEM 3D: HOLLYWOOD HOLOCAUST **3rd**
- ALLIED ASSAULT: BEACH LANDING **4th**

**Liquid\_Metal:** "Half-Life without a doubt – after being stuck inside and fighting for your life, it was almost overwhelming to break out into the over-the-top bright sunshine. It also had the feeling of taking the fight to them after they'd been trying to kill you."

**Cal40k:** "Duke Nukem's levels are still some of my all-time favourites. There's something about the city setting that just felt cool, before it was done to death everywhere else at least."

**Captain\_Moquette:** "I thought the MOH:AA beach landing was the worst level design in history. Start level: die. Restart level: die. Restart level: find a hidey hole! Die. Restart level..."

**DeadMartyr:** "Why isn't Jedi Knight or Deus Ex in there? One of Jedi Knight's greatest strengths was its level design. In the Mysteries Of The Sith add-on, I particularly remember 'New Republic Escort Ship' – the lack of gravity was a nice variation."

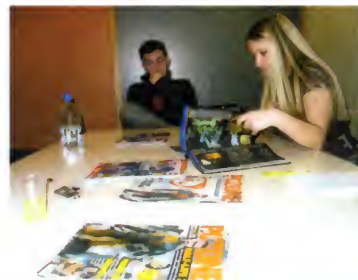
**S**OMEBODY UP TOP finally noticed that no matter what we're debating in the great Supertest arena, the conversation always ends up swaying towards Half-Life. So in desperation, the powers-that-be have given us an entire 20-odd minutes in which to talk about Gordon Freeman's wonderful adventures, hoping that we'll never again ruin a Supertest by pointing out that Half-Life did everything better.

You could practically taste the Half-Life love in the Supertest this month, as we all struggled to decide which bit of the Half-Life series we enjoyed most. It was no easy task – the tales of Gordon and Alyx are firmly lodged at the top of our all-time favourite game lists. Indeed, it would've been easier to come up with the worst bits of the series, like that spider boss with the giant testicles – what was Valve thinking?!

After Will had finally stopped gushing about his favourite Half-Life bits, we managed to reach a verdict. Suzy chose the zombie-bashing of Ravenholm as her favourite, while Andy chose the genius marine blasting of Surface Tension. Meanwhile, Steve plumped for the gravity gun catch game from Black Mesa East. Newcomer Jon (affectionately known as 'Log') championed the classic opening tram ride, and ring-leader Sefton gave his

vote to the super gravity gun mischief of Half-Life 2. Will cast the deciding vote of the Supertest, but being the masters of suspense that we are, we're going to make you load up the MP3 file from our DVD to find out the winner.

As always, to tell us your favourite Half-Life moment, take a trip to our fantabulous website over at [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk), where, via the gigantic 'INTERACT' button, you'll find a poll running on the PC ZONE forum. No swearing please – only Martin Korda's allowed to do that. **PCZ**



THE ZONE panel, shortly before the headcrabs were unleashed.





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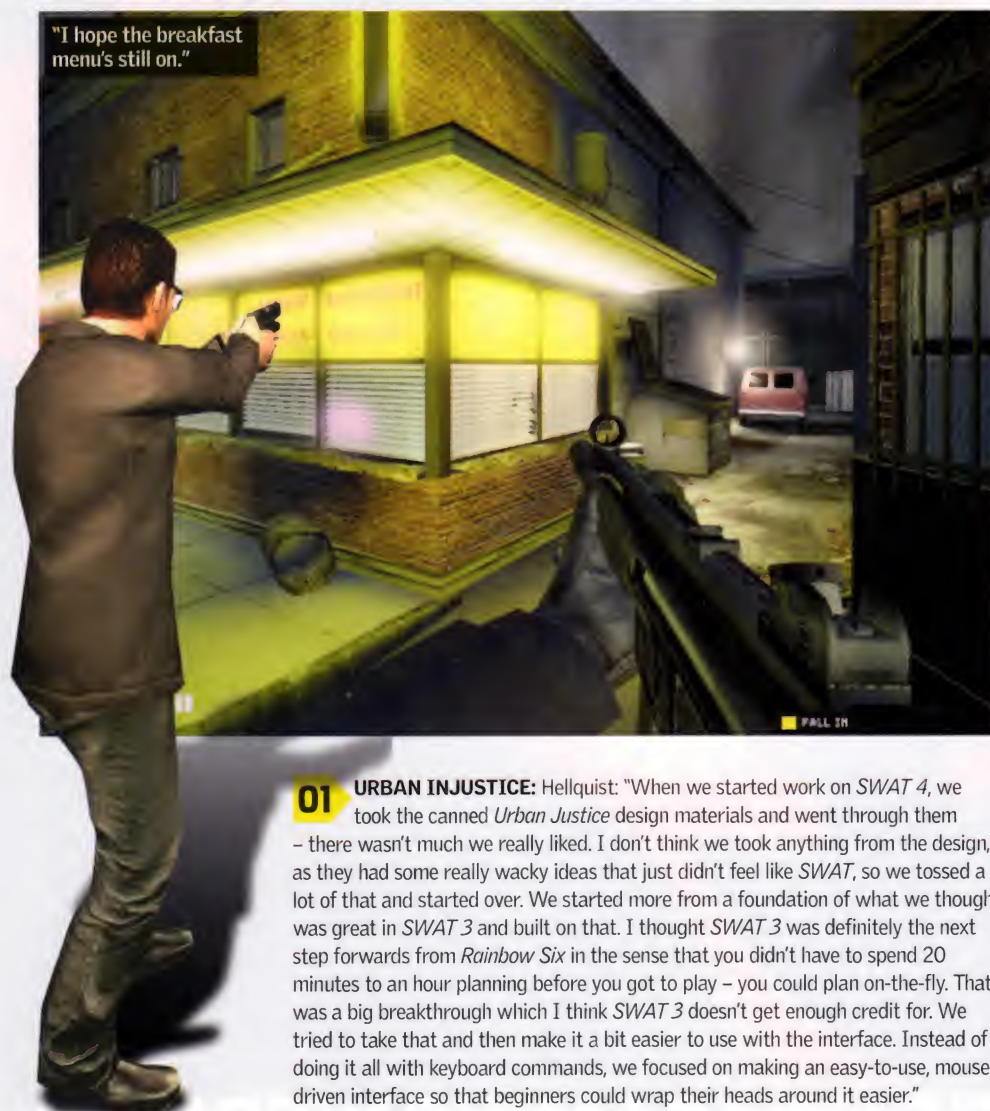


## DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

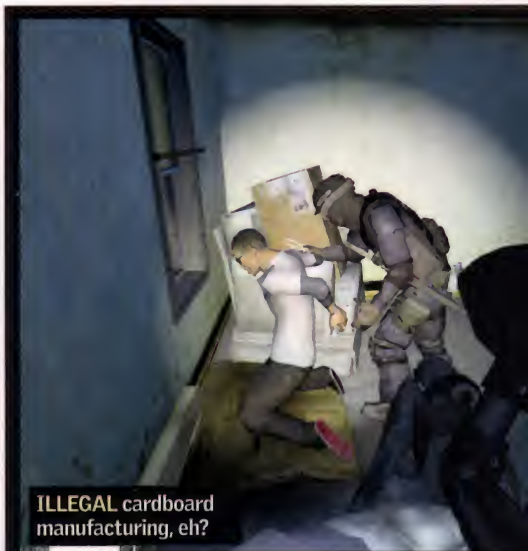
# SWAT 4

We flash, bang and clear to interrogate  
Irrational on its justice-dealing SWAT sim...

**B**EING BIG FANS of inflicting virtual harm on one another, we decided to grill (from left to right, so pay attention) lead designer Jay Kyburz, producer Joe Faulstick, designer Bill Gardner and lead designer Paul Hellquist on exactly what makes a good *SWAT* game. Is it the gritty realism? The believable story structure? Or is it just the ability to torment people you've tied up? Turns out it's all of these things, and a bit more...



**01 URBAN INJUSTICE:** Hellquist: "When we started work on *SWAT 4*, we took the canned *Urban Justice* design materials and went through them – there wasn't much we really liked. I don't think we took anything from the design, as they had some really wacky ideas that just didn't feel like *SWAT*, so we tossed a lot of that and started over. We started more from a foundation of what we thought was great in *SWAT 3* and built on that. I thought *SWAT 3* was definitely the next step forwards from *Rainbow Six* in the sense that you didn't have to spend 20 minutes to an hour planning before you got to play – you could plan on-the-fly. That was a big breakthrough which I think *SWAT 3* doesn't get enough credit for. We tried to take that and then make it a bit easier to use with the interface. Instead of doing it all with keyboard commands, we focused on making an easy-to-use, mouse-driven interface so that beginners could wrap their heads around it easier."



**02 REALISMISTIC:** Hellquist: "In *SWAT 3*, you had unlimited everything. We updated that so that you had to make tougher decisions about what gear to bring, because SWAT officers don't necessarily know what they're up against – they have to try and take the best equipment for whatever situation they're expecting. We wanted snipers in the game because snipers play a huge role in real SWAT operations." Kyburz: "We improved a great deal from an art point of view as well. A lot of work went into making these places really realistic, having hundreds of objects and really creepy spaces." Hellquist: "We definitely focused on trying to make gritty, urban environments that SWAT teams always encounter; whereas *SWAT 3* had very bright and airy spaces, we tried to go more into the nitty-gritty reality of what SWAT does every day."





## Real-life SWAT have this weird foam you can spray, and it hardens up and encases people

Paul Hellquist, lead designer



**03** **ARSING ABOUT WITH GUNS:** Hellquist: "We had Ken Thatcher teaching us everything he was allowed to tell us about how SWAT teams work. He's a veteran and still an active member of the LAPD SWAT. We also had a session with some guys from Boston's Metro SWAT. They took us out to one of their training areas, we got to play around with some air-soft versions of the weaponry and they showed us some flashbangs and how it feels to really be in those situations. They were very safety-conscious with flashbang training – they did it outside in a very open area and we were about 30-40ft away when they detonated it. It was impressive, and apparently it's nothing compared to being indoors where the force and the sound is bouncing off of everything." Gardner: "It was outside at high-noon in the snow, and it was still blinding." Hellquist: "You could just feel this wave of force go through your body – it was impressive. They let us put on all the armour and stuff too so we could see how heavy it was and how you could move in it – that was interesting."

**04** **DETAILS, DETAILS:** Gardner: "One of our designers, Sean Robinson, is a real gun nut – so he modelled all the weaponry for us." Hellquist: "We got reference photos of weapons from the SWAT guys too, got to shoot a shotgun and we were able to shoot some of the beanbag rounds on a training range. Plus, there are loads of websites about weapons – that was an asset we used for some of the more exotic weaponry." Kyburz: "Sean was joking with me the other day about how he put way too much detail into the weapons he modelled, and every moving part works even though you never see them doing so in the game – he had a lot of fun getting right down into the details. One of the pistols in the game is his grandfather's WWII Colt 1911."



**05** **CRAZY SWAT WEAPONS:** Hellquist: "There were some really interesting things that we came across in our research which we would've liked to have added, but there were too many technical hurdles. Real-life SWAT have this weird foam now that they can spray on people, and it hardens up and encases them. They have net guns and all kinds of crazy things that sounded really cool, but we had trouble thinking about how we could get them to work in the game." Kyburz: "We looked at all of that stuff again when we did the expansion – we added seven new weapons and went for the more interesting types like the grenade launcher."





# LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

BUDGET cutbacks meant that Jim had to make-believe with his fingers.



AUTO

28 / 30



OPEN & CLEAR

**06** **INDIVIDUAL MISSION STORIES:** Kyburz: "The individual missions were one of the things we really liked about *SWAT 4*, and although we do have a central theme to the missions in the expansion, they're still standalone." Hellquist: "We wanted lots of very different environments, from the banks to the little houses to the restaurants – we had so many different environments that we weren't confident we could make an over-arching story that wasn't going to be ridiculous. So what we tried to do was have each mission be its own fully-contained story between the briefing and the resolution part, which you get to be more directly involved in. I think the reviewers and critics really understood that and realised it didn't have an over-arching story, but the stories of each mission were better than a lot of over-arching stories in other tactical games."

"ACK! I can't see!  
Don't shoot!"



28 / 30



OPEN & CLEAR

**07** **TABOO:** Hellquist: "One note we were given from Vivendi was that we couldn't have any children in the missions as hostages or anything like that, because we didn't want any children getting killed with strays or anything. We had the child graveyard mission instead, which suggested all that terribleness happened prior to your arrival."

Gardner: "I think when Ken Levine comes in and is stunned by the darkness, we've gone too far. Beyond that, we pretty much created whatever sort of environments we wanted."

Faulstick: "That's the nice thing about *SWAT*: it's not gratuitous violence – buckets of blood and so on – it's just kind of creepy in a *Silence Of The Lambs* way."

Hellquist: "There were many times when I was playing the game and I was just blown away by the intensity and decisiveness of the violence in it. Sometimes, it just hits you in the gut how brutal it is. I'm sure that's what it's like for the actual SWAT guys too – it's just an instant and it's over."

"If only paintball ranges  
did look like this..."







**08 IRRATIONAL REFERENCES:** Hellquist: "With the subject matter being so serious in some of the levels and situations within *SWAT 4*, it was good to have a few light-hearted Irrational references slotted into the game too, just to remind people that you're still supposed to be having fun."

Gardner: "Also, we thought it was going to be our only chance to do this because it's based in the real world. In a game like *Freedom Force*, it's tough to get those easter eggs in without completely blowing the universe. I'm not sure you'll see too many of those in *BioShock*."

Hellquist: "We also had fun making up wacky products and the weird arcade games like 'Karate Fighter' – we wanted to add a bit of fun to the depressing world, and we enjoyed doing it too."

**That's the nice thing about *SWAT*: it's not gratuitous violence with buckets of blood, it's just creepy in a *Silence Of The Lambs* way**

Joe Faulstick, producer, *SWAT 4*



**09 SADISM AND NEEDLESS, GLORIOUS VIOLENCE:** Hellquist: "I was so happy realising how much fun it was to torment the person you've arrested in multiplayer VIP mode – that was just a happy, fun thing that evolved."

Kyburz: "You can punch them while they're down as well! You can arrest them, spray them, punch them and scream at them with the voice-over IP."

Hellquist: "That was another awesome feature that we'd started work on in the original but just ran out of time – the voice-over IP with the microphone. We were sad we didn't get that into the main game."

Faulstick: "Going back to the whole torturing the VIP thing; that's become a big tried-and-true online tactic. I was playing a couple of months ago and I saw that the people on my team would tazer the police as they were going for the bombs, but wouldn't kill them – they'd just continually keep them tazerred until the bomb exploded."

Kyburz: "Keeping two enemies down, tazering and peppering them is great fun. Keeping them occupied is better than letting them respawn." **PCZ**





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Staff Writer Steve 'Raving he's raving' Hogarty 020 7042 4728  
Staff Writer Jon 'Loj' Blyth 020 7042 4724  
Staff Writer Andy 'Here's to you Mrs' Robinson 020 7042 4316  
Contributors Pavel Barter, Dominik Diamond, Steve Hill, Martin  
da, Dan Marshall, Rosanna Negrotti, Steve O'Hagan, Kevin Pruitt  
Phil Wand. Thanks also to Supernova and Greaper.  
PCZONE.CO.UK Editor John Houltan 020 7042 4311  
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#### WE COMBINE

Publisher James Ashton-Tyler  
Group Publishing Director Mia Walter  
Business Group Ad Manager Darren Gratton  
Production Manager Ricky Clayton  
Marketing Executive Kim Brown  
Circulation Manager Paul Burden  
Production Co-ordinator Kirsten Bryan  
Production Manager Rose Griffiths  
Pure Plus Buyer Colin Polis

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Managing Director UK Robert Price  
Chief Executive Chairman Roger Parry  
Chief Executive Greg Ingham  
Group Finance Director John Bowman  
+44 1225 442244

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**NEXT ISSUE: PCZ #168**  
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this magazine please recycle it.

NEXTMONTH

EXCLUSIVE!

# BIOSHOCK

PC ZONE flies to Irrational Games' Boston studio for an exclusive look at the amazing new follow-up to chilling first-person sci-fi adventure *System Shock 2*! Unmissable report and brand-new screenshots – only in this mag!

PLUS!

## RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

Exclusive review and demo of the next title in the superb *Rise Of Nations* real-time strategy series – read our verdict and play the game!

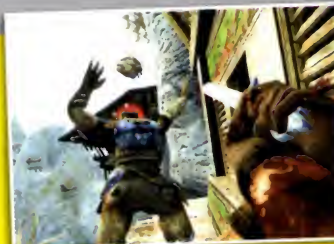


ALSO



#### GOthic 3

We visit the reclusive creator of the majestic medieval role-player



#### DARK MESSIAH

The latest on the *Might & Magic* shooter built on the Source engine!



#### SIN EPISODES: EMERGENCE

First review of Ritual's gorgeous futuristic FPS



#### SID MEIER SPECIAL!

Exclusive! We meet the strategy legend and get the heads-up on his three new games!

REVIEWED!

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND  
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY  
RED ORCHESTRA

PLAYABLE DEMOS!

Tomb Raider: Legend  
Rise Of Nations:  
Rise Of Legends  
SpellForce 2: Shadow Wars  
Condemned

PLUS!

Evil genius Demis Hassabis talks Elixir,  
Dominik Diamond enters the *City Of Heroes* and  
Steve Hill plays golf with Tiger Woods!

ON SALE  
THURSDAY  
APRIL 27!



# DOMINIK DIAMOND

A miracle has happened – I can hear! Games will never be the same again. But it means I no longer have an excuse not to come in for my tea when my mum calls...



**P**EOPLE HAVE SAID in the past that I turn a deaf ear to criticism. And I have. Literally. I've

been deaf in my right ear since I was a teenager. Until the other week when I let a surgeon drill a hole in my ear drum. I also let a nurse dress me in paper pants and put me in a bed in an ENT ward opposite a man who – I shit you not – had a hole in his throat and was carrying his lungs around in a bag.

Anyway, the result is that for the first time in 20 years I can hear in stereo. Music is a whole new experience – gaming (with

head phones on especially) is a new universe. I went through my collection to see what the difference would be.

*Quake 3*: I've always been in awe of those in high-end *Quake 3* clans, who talk in excited tones about lurking behind pillars until they hear an opponent's footfalls from the east. Those who, if pushed, could play by sense of hearing alone, like Tommy the pinball player of musical fame.

But now I know exactly how they feel. Well, the ones who aren't very good that is. For the first two hours I'm actually gazing round in wonder and awe. I hear a drip of water from over my right shoulder and I turn, thinking it's coming from the bathroom. Then I hear an ear-rending explosion and I turn to see my eyeballs peering skywards with what appears to be the remains of my gonads painting the walls like some fragtastic ragroll.

Yes, I'm still shit at the game. But now I'm shit in Lucas DTS Dolby Surround Sound Quadraphonic Home Cinema Earjism™!

## MAKE IT STOP

*Civilisation II*: those quaint tunes are even more annoying in the right ear than they were in the left. I feel like I'm in some late-night Open University history programme presented by a man with a beard but no moustache, yellowing teeth and a whole chapter in the local sex offenders list.

*Euro League Football* (featuring in-game commentary from Dominik Diamond): Holy earwax! Just how bad is my commentary

on this? And just how bad is this game?

Actually, *PC ZONE* said at the time: "This game should change the face of football games forever." It did. I was never asked to commentate on one again.

*Thief: Deadly Shadows*: the Shalebridge Cradle level: F\*\*\* off. No f\*\*\*ing way am I playing that with my new ears unless I'm wearing one of the babies' nappies.

*Jimmy White's 2: Cueball*: oh my god! Again, this is terrifyingly loud. It's no longer a gentle game played by part-time gangsters during the day, this is a full-on assault of the senses. Sounds like two oriental men going at each other hammer and tongs with snooker ball nunchukas. I'll tell you what though, the sound of those darts going into the board is now so round and mellow, it's almost erotic. Then the image of Archer McLean's face pops into my head and I quit the game feeling very, very wrong.

## SWOOSH!

Finally, how about *Star Wars: X-wing Vs TIE Fighter*? I have never, ever, ever heard the swoosh of a TIE Fighter passing over my bows in true DTS before. It's the most beautiful sound I've ever heard. Greater than the sound of my first-born child's mewling cries, greater than the 'br-br-br' guitar bit after the 'der-ner-ner-ner der-ner-ner-ner' opening of The Clash's *Should I Stay Or Should I Go*. Hey – I'm a DJ; I'm trained in describing shit like that. **PCZ**

**Holy earwax! Just how bad is my commentary, and how bad is this game?**





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